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CATHOLIC SOCIAL PRINCIPLES AND CHAYEZ:
A CASE STUDY

by

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PREFACE

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

July 29, 1970 was an historic day for Cesar Estrada Chavez and the AFL-CIO Farm Workers Organizing Committee. On that day an agreement was signed between the Union and twenty six grape growers in the Delano, California area. These twenty six growers produced half the states' table grape crop, and the contract covered close to 8,000 workers.¹ By early September, practically all of the table-grape growers of California had signed with UFWOC and the five year old grape strike came to an end.

Chavez achieved a goal that had eluded more orthodox labor leaders for three decades, namely the effective unionization of farm labor. Many reasons can be given for this unique success. First and foremost, it was a tribute to the doggedness, determination and perseverance of Chavez and the strikers themselves. Other reasons would be the effectiveness of the boycott; the support from such national figures as Robert Kennedy, Hubert Humphrey, Ralph Abernathy, Eugene McCarthy and others. But certainly, an

¹Los Angeles Times, "Handshakes Seal Pact Ending Grape Boycott." July 30, 1970, Part 1, p. 3.

important factor in bringing the grape strike to an end, was the intervention of the Catholic Bishops of the United States, and, in particular, the five-bishop Ad Hoc Committee appointed to mediate the farm labor dispute. It cannot be said that the bishops solved the dispute, but they did make the ultimate contribution which pushed the matter to a successful conclusion.

For many Roman Catholics the official intervention of their church in the farm labor dispute caused much surprise, and, in many instances, became a source of distress and indignation. However, if they had reviewed the Church's interest, concern and activity in connection with the American Labor movement, it would have come as no surprise.

Away back in 1887 the famous Archbishop James Gibbons 'went to bat' for a labor union--the Noble and Holy Order of the Knights of Labor. The Holy Office in Rome had condemned all secret societies in general, and the Canadian Knights in particular. A similar condemnation of the Knights in the United States seemed imminent. Terence V. Powderly, head of the American Knights, sought the help of Archbishop Gibbons of Baltimore. Archbishop Gibbons sailed to Rome in 1887 and was made a cardinal. In an address to the Council of Propaganda, Gibbons argued that the Knights were not, strictly speaking, a secret society. He also

upheld the rights of the workers to organize in defense of their own rights and warned of the danger for the Church if it was regularly found to be on the side of Capital, while ignoring Labor's just grievances. As a result the condemnation of the Knights was lifted.²

Four years later, on May 15, 1891, Pope Leo XIII issued the famous encyclical, "Rerum Novarum" (On the Condition of Labor). In this encyclical, Pope Leo declared that the workers had a right to form associations for their own protection and welfare; that excessive hours of labor are to be condemned; that a workman is entitled to a "just" wage, which is one that would enable him to live "in reasonable and frugal comfort."³

In 1906, a brilliant young American priest, Father John A. Ryan, published a treatise entitled, "A Living Wage; Its Ethical and Economic Aspects", which was destined to become the basis of the minimum wage law movement. Ryan himself headed the fight for minimum-wage legislation in several states.⁴

²Andrew Greeley, The Catholic Experience, (New York: Doubleday & Company, 1967), p. 196.

³Pope Leo XIII, The Five Great Encyclicals, (New York: The Paulist Press, 1961), pp. 24-27.

⁴Thomas Timothy McEvoy, Roman Catholicism and the American Way, (Notre Dame, Ind.: University of Notre Dame, 1960), p. 70.

In 1919 the Catholic Hierarchy published the so-called "Bishops Program of Social Reconstruction," a very progressive document drafted by Monsignor John A. Ryan. The Bishops advocated such proposals as state minimum wage legislation; unemployment, disability and old age insurance; protection for union organization; abolition of child labor; and profit sharing by employees. Many of the items proposed by the Bishops were in fact incorporated into state and federal legislation enacted in the middle thirties.⁵

The Catholic hierarchy continued to be active in the Labor movement during the thirties. Archbishop Edward J. Hanna of San Francisco was appointed to a three member board to settle a bitter 1933 agricultural strike in California. The same Archbishop was also made Chairman of the National Longshoremen's Board in 1934 which became involved in the bitter water front labor battles of that time. Bishop Francis J. Haas of Grand Rapids and Archbishop John T. McNicholas of Cincinnati were also active in the cause of labor peace during this period.⁶

Following World War II, priests and bishops vigorously opposed the right-to-work movement, which banned all the

⁵Aaron I. Abell, American Catholicism and Social Action, (New York: Hanover House, 1960) pp. 199 ff.

⁶Theodore Maynard, The Catholic Church and the American Idea, (New York: Appleton-Century-Crofts, Inc., 1953) p. 283.

usual types of union security--chiefly the closed shop, the union shop, and the maintainence of membership. Archbishop Joseph F. Rummel of New Orleans called the Louisiana right-to-work measure "unfair and unsocial".⁷ Archbishop Robert E. Lucey of San Antonio called the right-to-work laws "fraudulent" and declared that they were "a sad commentary on the greed, selfishness and stupidity of certain evil interests."⁸

The Second Vatican Council reaffirmed the traditional teaching of the Church with regard to the right of workers to organize and bargain collectively and, under certain circumstances, to resort to the strike. These matters were treated by the Council in its "Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World," which read, in part, as follows:

Among the basic rights of the human person must be counted the right of freely founding labor unions. These unions should be truly able to represent the workers and to contribute to the proper arrangement of economic life. Another such right is that of taking part freely in the activity of these unions without risk of reprisal. Through this sort of orderly participation, joined with an ongoing formation in economic and social matters, all will grow day by day in the awareness of their own function and responsibility. Thus

⁷ Benjamin L. Masse, S. J., Justice for All, (Milwaukee: Bruce Publishing Company, 1964), p. 120

⁸ Ibid., p. 120.

they will be brought to feel that according to their own proper capacities and aptitudes they are associates in the whole task of economic and social development and in the attainment of the universal common good.

When, however, socio-economic disputes arise, efforts must be made to come to a peaceful settlement. Recourse must always be had above all to sincere discussion between the parties. Even in present-day circumstances, however, the strike can still be a necessary, though ultimate, means for the defense of the workers' own rights, and the fulfillment of their just demands. As soon as possible, however, ways should be sought to resume negotiations and the discussion of reconciliation.⁹

On May 15, 1961 Pope John XXIII issued his encyclical, Mater et Magistra, which was an expansion of the ideas of Pope Leo XIII and Pope Pius IX, and brought up to date the teaching of the Church on social matters. Pope John added a warning in the encyclical. "It is not enough," he said, "merely to formulate a social doctrine. It must be translated into reality."¹⁰

The social doctrine of the Church, which is based on the inherent dignity of the individual created by God, could be summed up in the following tenets:

- 1) Every man is entitled to a "just" wage, which is one that will enable him to live in reasonable and frugal comfort.

⁹The Documents of Vatican II, (New York: America Press, 1966), pp. 274, 277.

¹⁰Pope John XXIII, Mater et Magistra, (New York: America Press, 1961), p. 61.

- 2) Workers have the right to form associations for their own protection and welfare.
- 3) Workers have the right to take part freely in the activity of a union, without fear of reprisal.
- 4) Workers can resort to the use of the strike, as an ultimate weapon, to secure their rights and attain their just demands.
- 5) The Church must not only formulate social doctrine, but also make sure that it is translated into reality.

This then is the summation of Catholic Social teaching with regard to labor unions. The Church's ethical approach to social matters caused it to become involved in the American labor movement from its inception after the Civil War. And when in the mid 1960's the farm workers in California tried to form a union to bargain collectively with the growers, the Church was once more called on to 'translate into reality' the age old message and doctrines of Leo XIII, Pius XI and John XXIII.

CHAPTER II

EARLIER INVOLVEMENT OF THE CHURCH

In the 1950's and early 1960's, many priest writers were drawing attention to the plight of the farm worker. And their position, generally speaking, was truly pathetic. The farm workers comprised only a small part of the total labor force in the United States. They were also a declining part of the labor force, both absolutely and relatively. In 1940, for example, the total number of farm workers in the United States numbered 2,679,000. By 1962 the total had dwindled to 1,817,000. One tenth of these were Mexican nationals ("braceros") who were brought every year to the United States to work on farms in the West and Southwest. A quarter of them were domestic migrant workers, largely Negroes and Mexican-Americans from Florida and Texas. The majority of these workers were poorly paid by American standards. This was especially true of the migrants, who in 1961 earned \$6.70 a day and \$1,039 a year on an average. In many cases the housing and health facilities of hired farm workers were grossly inadequate. They were not protected by the nation's labor laws, and their employers, bitterly and successfully, resisted unionization.¹ In com-

¹ Benjamin L. Masse, S. J., Justice for All, (Milwaukee: Bruce Publishing Company, 1964), p. 147.

menting on these farm workers, the eminent sociologist, Reverend Benjamin L. Masse, S. J., declared that the migrants were the "truly forgotten people in our affluent society." And he added, "Their plight is a disgrace for the five percent of U. S. farmers who employ them. It is a blot on the record of Congress, which has done little to help them. It is an abrasive challenge to the conscience of a nation that still considers itself God-fearing and Christian."²

Out in Delano, California a young, stocky Mexican-American by the name of Cesar Estrada Chavez quietly started organizing a union--The National Farm Workers Association--which was destined to have enormous influence in changing the status of the farm worker in the United States.

By 1965, the NFWA had 1,700 families enrolled. On September 8, 1965, when some 800 Filipino grape pickers belonging to the Agricultural Workers Organizing Committee, a dormant AFL-CIO group, went on strike in Delano for higher wages, Chavez and the NFWA joined them. And so "la Huelga" began.³

From the outset Chavez counted on the support of the

²Ibid

³John Gregory Dunne, Delano, (New York: Farrar, Straus & Grious, 1967), pp. 73-81.

Religious Groups. He was immediately aided by the California Migrant Ministry, an adjunct of the Division of Home Missions of the National Council of Churches. Chavez later asserted that had it not been for the help he received from the Migrant Ministry the strike would have failed and the union would have been defeated.⁴ Moreover, numerous Catholic priests, sisters and lay leaders supported Chavez from the beginning. An important one was Father Donald McDonnell, a pastor in San Jose, California, who first suggested to Cesar that he dedicate his life to the farm workers. The two often sat up late at night discussing the implications of the Church's social encyclicals.⁵ Father McDonnell also had a share in thrusting Chavez into prominence.

Saul Alinsky, the Chicago-based, self styled "professional radical," who has spent his life helping poor communities throughout the United States to organize themselves into effective power blocs, turned his attention to the Mexican-Americans of the Southwest in the early 1950's. In 1952 he sent Fred Ross into Southern California to set in motion there the Self-help Community Service Organization. Ross roamed the San Joaquin Valley for the

⁴"Church Must Do More for the Farm Workers, Chavez Says," National Catholic News Service, (June 8, 1970), p. 1.

⁵Interview with Father Victor Salandini, Research Director of the United Farm Workers Organizing Committee, AFL-CIO, February 16, 1971, at Fresno, California.

CSO, needling the Mexicans into political awareness, and when he formed a nucleus of workers willing to carry on the CSO's work in one town, he would move on to the next. Finally he arrived in San Jose and there he sought out Father McDonnell, who put him in contact with Cesar Chavez. Ross persuaded Chavez to join the CSO, first as an unpaid volunteer, later as a \$325-a-month staff member, and finally, general director from 1958 to 1962.⁶

On October 28, 1965 Chavez received rather spectacular aid from two priests of the Sacramento diocese, Father Keith Kenny and Father Arnold Meagher. These two, accompanied by Chavez, flew a light plane over the Bruno Dispoto ranch in Tulare County, using a loudspeaker to urge workers to strike. When they landed, Father Kenny explained calmly to growers and a deputy sheriff that he was helping because "human dignity was involved." He added, "this strike is a movement by the poor people themselves to improve their position. And where the poor are, Christ should be - and is."⁷

When an interfaith meeting was held on November 11, 1965 at Glide Methodist Church in San Francisco on behalf of the

⁶Dunne, Delano.pp. 53-56

⁷Alice Ogle, "Revolution in the Vineyards," America, Vol. 113 (Dec. 11, 1965), pp. 747-748.

striking workers, more than half the assembly were Catholic priests, nuns and lay people.⁸

One young priest, who became a close friend and staunch supporter of Cesar Chavez, was Father Victor Salandini of the San Diego diocese. He was typical of the clerics involved with Chavez in those early days. He was young, well-informed on Catholic social teaching and had worked closely with the farm laborers. At the outbreak of the strike, Father Salandini was pastor of Our Lady of Guadalupe Church on the east side of El Centro. He and many other young priests, such as Father Keith Kenny, worked closely with the Young Christian Workers Organization--(an organization of working youth dedicated to the Christianization of their environment.) At Y. C. W. seminars, conducted up and down the coast in the 40's, 50's and 60's, they discussed "hours on end" ways by which they could help the farm worker. When Chavez launched the National Farm Workers Association in 1962, the young priests were immediately interested. Here, at last, was a medium through which they could help the farm worker in a practical way. And so they rallied to Chavez and his cause.

In September 1965, Father Salandini left El Centro for Washington, D. C., for doctoral studies at Catholic University. Chavez asked Father to lobby for him in Wash-

⁸ Ibid., p. 748

ington, D. C. and later appointed him "Research Director of the United Farm Workers Organizing Committee." Incidentally Father Salandini's doctrinal dissertation was on "The Impact of the Termination of Public Law 78." It had to do with the end of the "bracero" program, which had lasted over 22 years, from August 4, 1942 to December 31, 1964. The main thrust of the dissertation was that, while we got rid of the "bracero" in 1967, there were more Mexican nationals in California in 1967 than in any one year of the 22 years of the "bracero" program.⁹

Father Salandini was rather critical of the official role of the Church in the farm worker movement. He felt the Bishops should have become involved much sooner than they did. "From time immemorial", he declared, "The Bishops in the southwest have tended to side with the power structure - the farming interests. This has been interpreted by the workers that the Church was with the rich and not with the poor."¹⁰

Father Salandini also felt that more priests should have been helping the farm-worker achieve social justice. "I do not think," the young priest said, "It has been done out of malice. I am sure that many of the priests aren't

⁹ Interview with Father Salandini, February 16, 1971.

¹⁰ Ibid.

involved in the farm workers' struggles, not because they have no love of the farm worker, but because of lack of training, lack of knowledge, of the whole thing." To remedy this deficiency he recommended that more economics and sociology be taught in the seminaries.¹¹

Whatever the reason, the priests in Delano and other areas affected by the strike, chose to sit squarely, if uncomfortably, on the fence. "If the growers have a poor year, the Church feels the effects of a poor harvest," said Father James Dillon, pastor of St. Mary's Catholic Church in Delano. "We take the stand that it is not our place to take sides. It would be as wrong to be on the growers' side as it would be to take the side of the workers. The rightness or wrongness of the strike is something I can't answer. It's not a moral issue. I think it is an economic issue."¹²

But there were others of all faiths who disagreed with him. On Monday, December 13, 1965, some ten nationally recognized figures of the major faiths, Protestant, Catholic and Jewish, journeyed to Delano, California. They formed what was called "A Committee of Religious Concern."

¹¹Ibid.

¹²Dunne, Delano, p. 82.

The declared purpose of the trip was to "establish a better understanding of the facts of the situation concerning the conflict between the growers and the grape strikers." Then the Committee would draw "their own conclusions and make statements and/or recommendations."¹³ Included among the group were two Catholic priests, Fathers John Wagner of San Antonio, Texas, secretary of the U. S. Bishops Committee for the Spanish Speaking, and James L. Vizzard, S. J., director of the Washington, D. C. Office of the National Catholic Rural Life Conference. Father Wagner told the group, "I thank you for what you are doing here for those in Texas who still work on farms for 45 or 50 cents an hour. They look at what you are doing here and it gives them hope."¹⁴

Father Vizzard went further. He used the occasion to issue a public statement in which he charged that the bishops were "frozen with fear" and like "the shepherd who abandoned his sheep when they were under attack." He went on to say that if the growers succeeded in discouraging or starving out the strikers it was because "we, the Church, have failed to give the workers every support we can, both on the material

¹³"Priests Laud Grape Strike. Example to Harvest Workers," N. C. News Service, Dec. 17, 1965.

¹⁴Ibid.

and moral level. Then not only will our high-sounding principles seem to the workers merely a sham, but also we will have lost any right later to claim their loyalty and cooperation."¹⁵

The public statement of Father Vizzard stirred the wrath of Bishop Aloysius J. Willinger, whose diocese of Monterey-Fresno included Delano. He replied to the charges in his own diocesan newspaper, the Central California Register. The bishop said, "There is an old saying, if you don't blow your own horn, who is there to blow it for you? One of the horn blowers of the day is the Reverend James L. Vizzard, S. J. His participation in the dispute in Delano was an act of unadulterated disobedience, insubordination and a breach of office."¹⁶

Father Vizzard had indeed defied his clerical superior when he issued a public statement at Delano. The superior in question was the Rt. Rev. Edward O'Rourke, Executive Director of the National Catholic Rural Life Conference. A month previously, on November 17th, Monsignor O'Rourke had told Father Vizzard "to avoid public involvement in the strike of the grape workers at Delano."¹⁷ Yet a month

¹⁵ Statement prepared by Rev. James L. Vizzard, S. J. Director, Washington Office, National Catholic Rural Life Conference, Released Tuesday P. M., Dec. 14, 1965.

¹⁶ "The Horn Blower of Delano", Central California Register, January 6, 1966, pp. 1, 10.

¹⁷ Ibid.

later, this same body issued a public statement in support of the grape workers. At their winter conference, held in Oklahoma City on January 28, 1966, the unanimous decision of the executive committee of the NCRLC was to support the Grape Workers strike. "The workers' request for higher wages," the committee statement declared, "Is in keeping with their basic rights. Therefore, we protest vigorously both the refusal by their employers to honor their requests and the harassment of the strikers." The report concluded, "The failure on the part of most of the growers to recognize the right of the workers to organize and conduct a peaceful strike shows that much must be done to develop a Christian conscience toward such issues." Monsignor O'Rourke was a member of the committee. Also present at the meeting, and approving of the resolution, was Bishop Frederick W. Freking of La Crosse, Wisconsin, Episcopal advisor to the conference.¹⁸

Many bishops were to become involved in the farm labor dispute, but perhaps no one saw the issues more clearly than Bishop Hugh A Donohoe of Stockton, a slight, white-haired man who spoke with a hint of an Irish brogue. As a young priest he had studied at the Catholic University

¹⁸ "NCRLC Supports Grape Workers," N. C. News Service, Jan. 28, 1966.

of America in Washington, D. C., and had learned Catholic social doctrine from the renowned Monsignor John A. Ryan. He received a Ph. D. from the Catholic University in economics. He did his dissertation on labor-management relations, and later was able to put this knowledge to use when he mediated in labor disputes in the San Francisco Bay Area.¹⁹

When the U. S. Senate subcommittee on migratory labor, headed by Senator Harrison Williams of New Jersey, held hearings at Delano, California, on March 16th, 1966, Bishop Donohoe testified. His statement had the approval of California's seven bishops, including Bishop Willinger, and so, in effect, it was the first public statement of the California bishops on the farm labor dispute. "We regret the spirit of hostility that pervades farm labor disputes," Bishop Donohoe said. "Any group in society has the right to form an association to foster its own well being." The Bishop said this applied to both farmers and to farm laborers. He continued, "We appreciate the fear of the farmer, especially the independent farm. There is need for legislation and programs which protect and encourage him in his need and right to form his own effective organization." Bishop Donohoe also warned both sides that: "It would be unjust for the farm worker or

¹⁹ Interview with Bishop Hugh A. Donohoe, D. D., at Fresno, California, February 16, 1971.

grower-processor-distributor organizations to strive to prevent by reprisal the legitimate efforts of farmers to form these organizations. It would be equally unjust for farmers or grower organizations to strive to prevent by reprisal the legitimate efforts of farm laborers to form worker associations or unions. It is not sufficient to recognize the right to organize in theory only." "Moreover," Bishop Donohoe asserted, "In order that this right be recognized in fact it is of crucial importance for the various governments to legislate criteria and techniques, etc., for determining the legitimacy of a particular effort to organize workers and to protect these workers from reprisals for joining in these organizing efforts." He concluded, "This need has been met in other fields of labor by the National Labor Relations Act. We know of no compelling reasons for excluding farm management-labor relations from the NLRA." "But," Bishop Donohoe warned, "This one act will not solve the farm labor problem, although it would be a first and giant step toward a solution." To him, thus, it was apparent that unless farm workers were given the chance to organize, they were going to become wards of the state.²⁰

²⁰"A Bishop Delivers Catholic Statement at Delano Hearing," Central California Register, March 17, 1966, pp. 1-10.

The Catholic Bishops of California, and later the National Conference of Catholic Bishops, were to advocate, time and time again, the inclusion of the farm workers under the labor relations act. The Bishops were referring to the National Labor Relations Act of 1935 (also known as the Wagner Act), which granted employees the right to organize and bargain collectively through representatives of their own choosing. The farm workers were deliberately excluded from protection under the act, and consequently when Chavez formed his union, there was no place for him to go to get recognition for the union. However since 1935 the Wagner Act has been amended four times. The amendments included the anti-labor Taft-Hartley and Landrum-Griffin Acts of 1947 and 1959 respectively, which limited strikes and forbade secondary boycotts. If the United Farm Workers Organizing Committee was included under the labor relations laws they would be forced to desist from secondary boycotts, for example, the boycotting of stores that sold table grapes. It is not surprising therefore, that in April of 1969, when the strike was at its height and the boycott was proving very effective, Chavez backed away from efforts to include the union under the National Labor Relations Act. He implied that the NLRA would, at

that time, impede union growth and help the California
²¹ growers.

Thus Chavez was in disagreement with the Bishops on this point. Nevertheless the Catholic Church became more deeply involved, but with Chavez leading the way. On March 17, the day after the hearings, Chavez set off on the celebrated workers' march, or "peregrinacion", from Delano to the capitol steps in Sacramento. Like most events planned by the strikers it had a Catholic aura about it. Chavez himself was a practicing Catholic. Since the great majority of the farm laborers in California were Mexican-American, most of them also were, at least nominally, Catholic. Chavez always insisted that the movement be identified, in some way, with the faith. His hunger strikes became "fasts" so as to identify with the "penitencia" of Mexican Catholics. The strikers always carried a banner of Our Lady of Guadalupe, the Aztec-form painting of the Mother of Christ, who is the patron of the Mexican people.

The Theme of this particular march was "Penitence, Pilgrimage and Revolution." Chavez felt from the beginning that the march should be penitential like the Lenten processions of Mexico, an atonement for past sins of vio-

²¹"Chavez Rejects NLRA Bid," NC News Service, April 18, 1969.

lence on the part of the strikers, and a kind of prayer.²²

Eighty striking farm workers made the 300 mile march from Delano to Sacramento in 25 days. On the way they stopped off for a special Mass at St. Mary of the Assumption Church in Stockton. Bishop Donohoe addressed the workers and told them "This is a march not for physical fitness but for physical existence." "The march," he related, "Is not against the farmers but for recognition of the rights of the farm workers, and for their acceptance as a necessary segment of the community."²³

A bonfire rally was held on Holy Saturday night in Sacramento. It featured a foot race, Olympic style, by which ten Mexican youths brought flames from the new fire lighted at the Easter vigil rites in Our Lady of Guadalupe Church, Sacramento, that night. The final rally, on Easter Sunday morning, at the steps of the state capitol, took on the nature of a victory rally. Chavez announced to a crowd of 6000 that the Schenley Industries, second-largest grower in the state, had agreed to recognize the union as the sole bargaining agent for its agricultural employees in the Cen-

²² Peter Matthiessen, Sal Si Puedes: Cesar Chavez and the New American Revolution, (New York: Dell Publishing Co., Inc., 1969), p. 127.

²³ "Bishop Says Delano March for 'Existence'", The Tidings, April 15, 1966. Sec. 1, p. 6.

tral California vineyards.²⁴

Chavez, through his personal frugality, spiritual fasts and restrained rhetoric, managed to maintain an unflawed image of the rightness of his cause. His close association with the Catholic Church and his excellent relations with California's liberal Protestants, gave his movement a deeply moral cast. It was fortunate, too, that California had a Bishop of the caliber of Hugh A. Donohoe. Shy, conservative by nature and somewhat wary of Chavez, he, nevertheless, saw clearly that there were moral principles involved. It was primarily through his influence that the California Bishops issued a statement, which emphasized the right of the workers to organize for the purposes of collective bargaining. Bishop Donohoe was to suffer much because of his stand. His actions, however, paved the way for greater involvement of the Catholic Church in the Farm Labor Dispute.

²⁴ "Marching Strikers Hail 'First Victory'",
The Tidings, April 15, 1966. Sec 1, p. 7.

CHAPTER III

A BISHOP SEARCHES FOR THE TRUTH

The Schenley success did not lead to surrender by other growers. Chavez and his followers faced further difficulties in their efforts to improve the life of the farm worker. But they gained more support as more and more people were persuaded of the justice of the cause of the farm worker. In addition, changes within the Catholic Church in the United States, particularly in California, would strengthen the Chavez movement. Now, Chavez intensified his efforts, but encountered serious tribulations.

The summer of 1966 was a long hot summer of accusations, violence, reprisals, injunctions and arrests. Among the arrested were Chavez himself, the Reverend Chris Hartmire, head of the California Migrant Ministry, and Father Victor Salandini, who was at this time a parish priest in Escondido. On June 29th, 1966, Chavez and the NFWA called a strike against the Di Giorgio ranches in Borrego Springs and Delano. That night, Chavez, Hartmire and Salandini, accompanied by eight of the strikers, went to the Di Giorgio's Borrego Springs Ranch, east of San Diego. They were promptly arrested for trespassing by deputy sheriffs, who searched them, stripped them, chained

them together and deposited them in the San Diego jail.¹

Later, September 7, 1966, Chavez and the two clergymen were fined \$526 each and placed on two years summary probation.

Father Salandini claimed that the incident was very useful to the cause, because it received much publicity and removed the growers further from the sympathy of the public.²

The cause was enhanced by other developments within the Catholic Church itself. In October 1967, Bishop Aloysius J. Willinger announced his retirement as head of the Monterey-Fresno diocese. Rome announced that the diocese would be divided into two separate dioceses of Monterey and Fresno. Bishop Harry A. Clinch became the first Bishop of Monterey and Bishop Timothy Manning, Auxiliary Bishop of Los Angeles, was named head of the newly created diocese of Fresno. The latter came to Fresno in December of 1967, and since Delano was part of the Fresno diocese, he was immediately plunged into the farm labor dispute. The bishop declared, "I had no concept at all of the farm labor problem, except an academic approach to it."³

¹"Clergymen, Unionist, 8 Grape Strikers Chained and Jailed", Los Angeles Times, July 1, 1966, Part 1, pp. 1 & 8.

²Interview with Father Victor Salandini, February 16, 1971.

³Interview with Timothy Manning, D. D., J.C.D., Archbishop of Los Angeles, Los Angeles, California, April 1, 1971.

In Fresno Bishop Manning met a number of people who were willing to help him considerably with the whole situation there. One was Monsignor Roger Mahoney, who was then head of the Catholic Charities in Fresno. Bishop Manning said of Monsignor Mahoney, "He was the key man in the whole negotiations. Roger was my introduction to both sides. He was 'persona grata' with everybody there. He was extremely well-informed on the whole situation, and certainly, without his help, I could not have come through that crisis in the manner in which I did."⁴

Although Monsignor Mahoney was born and raised in the Los Angeles area, he noted that "all his family, his greater family, worked in the San Joaquin Valley and that he was always interested in that part of the state."⁵ As a consequence he knew personally many of the growers and inhabitants of the valley. In the summer of 1963, between two years of study at Catholic University of America for his master's degree in social work, the young priest had personally surveyed the social services needs of the Central San Joaquin Valley. He had seen the poverty and the hardships that seasonal unemployment and low wages caused

⁴ Ibid

⁵ Interview with Monsignor Roger Mahoney, Chancellor of the Fresno diocese, Fresno, California, February 16, 1971.

among agricultural workers.

With Bishop Willinger's permission, Monsignor Mahoney went to Delano and began two years of talking to both sides in the growing dispute, driving the 78 mile journey from Fresno to Delano, sometimes daily. "I was anxious," he said, "to find out from them how they saw the whole thing, and try to share with them the Church's concern for the rights of the farm workers to form their own associations."⁶

When Bishop Manning arrived in the diocese, he asked Mahoney about the grape strike. "I told him I felt that if the Church was going to have a role in this, it had reached the point where he (Manning) was going to have to take an active role in it himself."⁷

With the aid of Monsignor Mahoney, Bishop Manning accumulated as much knowledge and information as he could on the situation. He met first of all with many of the growers in the valley; talked with the small growers in his office in Fresno; met with Chavez and his staff at Delano and then met with all the priests of the diocese.

Bishop Manning expressed his sympathy for the farm worker. "For thirty years," the Bishop declared, "they

⁶ Ibid.

⁷ Ibid.

had been promised legislation. But they were excluded from the National Labor Relations Act and from protection under the law. We had to assert, in the face of the community, that the workers had the right to organize. This could not be denied or muted in any way.⁸ The Bishop judged that "in many, many instances the workers had fine opportunities, they had adequate homes, they had their own Church and a fine relationship existed between them and the grower. Nevertheless they were still a 'kept' people, and no matter how idyllic their situation, they still had the right to organize."⁹

Bishop Manning also expressed sympathy for the small, or so-called independent, farmer. "These were the real victims of the crisis there," the Bishop said. "They were people who had small acreage, who grew certain crops and depended on the markets to sell those. They had no problems with employees, they had no objection to the claims of the labor people and could understand the problems of the growers. Literally hundreds of them lost their properties."¹⁰

⁸ Interview with Archbishop Manning, April 1, 1971.

⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰ Ibid.

Nevertheless the Bishop felt he had to defend the right of the worker to organize for collective bargaining purposes. This and other issues connected with the farm labor dispute were openly thrashed out in the official Catholic newspaper of the Fresno diocese, the Central California Register. The Register, at that time, was under the editorship of a brilliant young Catholic journalist by the name of Gerard E. Sherry. Born and raised in Liverpool, England, Sherry obtained an excellent grasp of Catholic doctrine, especially Catholic social teachings, through his membership in the Catholic Evidence Guild and the Young Christian Worker movement. After World War II, while working as editor of the London Catholic Herald, he took courses at the London School of Economics. In 1948 he married, in England, Evelyn Kingsley of Clifton, New Jersey. The young couple came to the United States in 1949, and shortly thereafter Sherry accepted an assignment as associate editor of the Catholic Almanac. It was to be the start of a very promising career in Catholic journalism.¹¹

In 1954 Sherry accepted the position of news editor of the Catholic Universe Bulletin in Cleveland, Ohio and

¹¹ Interview with Gerard E. Sherry, Editor of the Central California Register, Los Angeles, Calif., April 23, 1971.

in 1956 was named editor of the Catholic Review in Baltimore. In 1960, the health of his daughter, Thea, forced him to move to California, where he accepted the post of editor of the Central California Register, official newspaper of the Fresno-Monterey Diocese.

In December of 1962 Sherry was asked to found the Georgia Bulletin, a newspaper for the Archdiocese of Atlanta, in collaboration with the late and revered Archbishop Paul J. Hallinan. In 1966 he took over as editor of a daily newspaper, the Dominion News of Morgantown, West Virginia. He returned to California in October, 1967, when he was again offered and accepted the post as editor
12
of the Central California Register.

When Sherry returned as editor of the Register, he found that the Church was held in great disrepute by the farm workers--this because the now retired Ordinary, Bishop Willinger, had forbidden the paper to mention Cesar Chavez or give any favorable notice to his United Farm Workers Organizing Committee. Indeed, before his return, two top officials in the Monterey Fresno diocese had constantly suggested that Chavez was under Communist influence and could not be supported. Indeed, the only mention of the grape strike in the Central California Register had been

¹²Ibid.

from the growers' point of view.¹³

But Sherry was determined to give fair coverage to both sides. In March, 1968, Chavez went on a fast before declaring a national boycott on California grapes. Sherry covered and published pictures and stories on the Thanksgiving Mass in Delano at the end of the fast. Both Sherry and Bishop Manning, who was then the Fresno Ordinary, received economic threats from several leading growers in the Valley because the Register dared to publish information on the Thanksgiving Mass. Indeed, the matriarch of one prominent grower family personally told Sherry that if he didn't change his ways, she would get advertisers to stop advertising and get him dismissed. In fact, shortly after that an injurious boycott was started against the Register.¹⁴

Sherry also provided both the National Catholic News Service and Religious News Service (which serves most of the daily newspapers) with almost weekly news items and monthly news analyses of the dispute. This meant that newspaper readers throughout the nation were given fre-

¹³ Ibid.

¹⁴ Ibid.

quent examinations of the whole question.¹⁵

Later, Sherry was co-opted onto the U. S. Bishops Committee on Farm Labor as its only lay consultant. He was active in the latter part of the final agreements in Delano and the subsequent negotiations in the Salinas Valley. There is no question in the minds of the top social action officials in the U. S. Catholic Conference that the editorial stand of the Central California Register had a major effect nationally and locally in the San Joaquin Valley.¹⁶

Concerning his coverage of the farm labor dispute, Bishop Manning asserted, "he (Sherry) had a vision and perspective in these matters, which was very penetrating, very just and fearless. He is a superb newspaperman and very well informed on these matters. He was fearless in facing up to any criticism that came to him. He and his paper suffered much because of his stand, but he has no regrets, and no apologies--and I agree with him totally."¹⁷

When Bishop Manning came to the Fresno diocese, he

¹⁵Ibid.

¹⁶Interview with Monsignor George Higgins, Los Angeles Calif., January 29, 1971.

¹⁷Interview with Archbishop Manning, April 1, 1971.

discovered a young Franciscan priest, Father Mark Day, in Delano who was vitally interested in the condition of the strikers. For various reasons the Bishop recommended that he be replaced by an older Franciscan priest. The Bishop felt that an older priest, with more experience, "one who would not be carried away with enthusiasms, that have to be modified in issues like these," might be more helpful. And so he proposed to the Franciscan provincial that this change be made. However, when this became known a number of people came up from Delano and engaged in a sit-in at the Bishops office in Fresno. They declared that they would stay there until such time as Father Day was allowed to remain. Since Bishop Manning had no personal convictions about Father Day himself, he agreed, and consequently the young priest was made an assistant in Our Lady of Guadalupe parish in Delano and assigned to minister to the spiritual needs of the farm workers there.¹⁸

While Manning was adapting himself to the problem, Chavez continued to publicize the movement and on February 14, 1968 started a twenty-five day fast at Delano, which one union spokesman said was "a penitential and spiritual act" to help his followers to rededicate themselves to the

¹⁸ Ibid.

principle of non-violence.¹⁹ It was said to be a reaction on the part of Chavez to certain Mexican-American leaders, who had urged the workers to greater militancy to attain their aims. From February 14, Father Mark Day celebrated Mass daily at the fasting site. Most days about 800 to 1,000 strikers and their families attended the Mass. On February 25th, Bishop Manning, accompanied by Monsignor Mahoney visited Chavez in Delano. It was emphasized that the visit was not intended to take sides, but to endorse the principle of non-violence.²⁰

Chavez ended his fast on Sunday, March 10th. He, along with some 5,000 workers and their families, attended an open air Mass concelebrated in Spanish. Father Mark Day, O.F.M., was the principal concelebrant of the Mass. The other concelebrants were priests from San Francisco, Fresno, Stockton and Sacramento dioceses. Bishop Timothy Manning gave permission for the special outdoor Mass to accomodate the large crowd expected.

¹⁹ Gerard E. Sherry, "Fast of Farm Workers Leader Stresses Strike Non-Violence," NC News Services, February 28, 1968.

²⁰ Ibid.

Chavez said in a statement read at the Mass that:

To be a man is to suffer for others. God help us to be men. When we are really honest with ourselves we must admit that our lives are all that really belong to us. So it is how we use our lives that determines what kind of men we are. It is my deepest belief, that only by giving our lives do we find life. I am convinced that the truest act of courage, the strongest act of manliness is to sacrifice ourselves for others in a totally non-violent struggle for justice.²¹

Bishop Manning was now deeply concerned about the crisis. Chavez and most of the farm workers were Catholic. Many of the growers, especially in the San Joaquin Valley, were Catholic. The Church has to have concern for all members of its flock. In the grape dispute, Bishop Manning personified such a concern. He suffered many personal conflicts, trying to be fair to both sides. But the Church could not turn its back on its own teaching. And the issue in the Farm Labor dispute was very clear, very elementary, very simple--namely the right of farm workers to organize into a union and bargain collectively with the growers. And both Manning and Donohoe stood behind this principle. Naturally the growers, who were generally unaware of the Catholic Social teaching, resented each and every intervention of the Church in the Farm Labor Dispute.

²¹Gerard E. Sherry, "Striking Farm Workers Leader Ends Fast," NC News Service, Delano, Calif., March 11, 1968.

CHAPTER IV

CHAVEZ CHALLENGES THE CHURCH

In May 1968 Gerry Sherry went down to Delano and had an interview with Cesar Chavez. The interview was distributed by the National Catholic Conference News Service and Religious News Service throughout the country and published in the Central California Register of May 23, 1968. The interview touched on many areas of the farm labor dispute, but what is of special importance is Chavez's concept of the role of the Church in the whole affair. "The Church cannot merely play the role of conciliator in the cause of social justice," Chavez said, "It has to become an active partisan in the struggle for justice. When poor people get involved in a long conflict such as a strike or a civil rights drive and pressures increase every day, there is a deep need for spiritual advice. Without it we see families crumble, leadership weaken, and hard workers grow tired."¹

Chavez had already criticized the attitudes of the local churches in Delano and he believed that the poor and the needy should have been the major concern of churchmen.

¹ Gerard E. Sherry, "Hot Summer seen in California's Strike-bound Vineyards," NC News Service, May 10, 1968, Delano, Calif.

But he was also careful not to claim that there wasn't some need for church concern for the growers. "Of course the growers need to be ministered to. They ought to have consideration from the Church. We tell those who work for us, whether priest, minister or rabbi, that we don't want them to blindly say we are completely right. We want to be criticized when we are wrong. We don't want them to say they are 100 per cent for the union, irrespective of how unjust we may be. We don't want that. We just want the backing of the Church in the just demands for the application of its teaching in our cause and the cause of all those who suffer injustice of oppression."

When asked what he wanted the Church to do, Chavez summed it up rather succinctly, "We don't ask for more cathedrals. We don't ask for bigger churches or fine gifts. We ask for its presence with us, beside us, as Christ among us. We ask the Church to sacrifice with the people for social change, for justice and for love of brother. We don't ask for words. We don't ask for paternalism. We ask for servanthood."²

Whether Chavez's 'challenge' had any effect on the Bishops of California or not, is debatable. They did,

²Ibid.

however, issue a second statement on the farm labor problem. It was issued from Sacramento on Thursday, June 6, 1968. They reiterated many of the items mentioned in their statement of 1966. Once more they called for, and this time more urgently, the National Labor Relations Act to include farm workers. "We feel strongly," they said, "that genuine, lasting peace will never come to farm management-labor relations until the farm workers are included under the National Labor Relations Act. We have witnessed chaos and human suffering all too clearly to judge otherwise."

They insisted that there was a moral issue involved in this area of human relations. "Only the recognition on both sides of the dignity of the human person will contribute to a just solution," the statement said. "There will be no peace until we recognize the contradiction between this inherent dignity and the actual poor living conditions existing for many of these worker families." The Bishops reaffirmed as part of the social teaching of the Church, "the right of all men--both farmers and farm workers--to organize themselves for purposes of collective bargaining and mutual protection."³

³"California Bishops on Farm Labor Problems," (Press Release of U. S. Catholic Conference, June 1, 1968) Documentary Service.

The summer of 1968 was a long, hot summer in the San Joaquin Valley. And it got hotter as the summer progressed, and in more ways than the desert heat. It was a summer of accusations, counter-accusations, reprisals and violence. At this time an anti-union force was founded by a certain Jose Mendoza, called the Agricultural Workers Freedom to Work Association. The AWFWA members were recruited mostly from the San Joaquin Valley, especially around the Delano and Bakersfield areas, where much of the tension existed between the grape growers and the striking members of Chavez's farm workers union.

The Church was to find itself involved with AWFWA on June 29th. On that day an "Issues Conference for the Spanish-Speaking," organized by the Fresno diocese, was held at St. Paul's Newman Center near the campus of Fresno State College. It was about to begin, when members of AWFWA arrived by chartered bus and a caravan of private cars. In all there were about 150 members of the anti-union group, who demanded admittance to the conference, charging that it was merely a cover-up for a pro-Chavez meeting in favor of the United Farm Workers Organizing Committee.⁴

⁴Gerard E. Sherry, "Anti-Union Force Confronts Delano Farm Strikers," NC News Service, Fresno, Calif. July 1, 1968

The members of AFWA carried posters which read: "Bishop Helps Chavez Promote Revolution;" "Bishop Rejects True Worker;" "We Need Religion Not Revolution;" "Are Revolutionaries the Only Ones of God's Children?" "Bishop is for Social Injustice;" "Church is for Social Injustice."

Mendoza and his followers attempted to enter the Newman Center but were rebuffed by Monsignor Mahoney, who was one of the officials of the conference. He told them that the meeting "was not arranged to debate the pros and cons of farm labor unions." Mendoza said that they wanted to be heard. "We too have problems. We are tired of Chavez and his men. We also want to know by what right a man who wears a black suit (the Delano priest) can tell us we are not Christians because we refuse to support Chavez." The "Delano priest" Mendoza referred to was Father Mark Day, O.F.M., who was then stationed at Our Lady of Guadalupe parish in Delano.⁵

Monsignor Mahoney told Mendoza that this was not the purpose of the conference. He ordered him and his followers to move from the Newman Center grounds on to public property. He also told Mendoza that he could choose three members of his anti-union to observe at the conference. Three

⁵Ibid.

women were chosen and sat through until lunch when they reported back to Mendoza.

During the lunch period several members of the conference sat out on the grounds eating their box-lunches. In full view of these members, Mendoza, and some of his aides, set fire to the United Farm Workers union flag, normally used for strike rallies. Though several women of the anti-union group pleaded with Mendoza not to do it, he squirted the flag with a can of lighter fluid until it was destroyed. Later the Mendoza group gave away leaflets which declared:

We are the true farm workers - we have never walked out of our jobs. Chavez does not represent us and we are not starving. We are content with the progress we have made in the past without the Chavez organizing committee, which has only caused us anguish during our working hours and our time at home. We are the true farm workers and we deeply resent the support of the Church to the Chavez movement. We feel it is our constitutional right to be able to work for whom we choose without harassment and intimidation from the Church,⁶ the government, and the self-appointed Cesars.

At the time of these events, nothing much was known of AFWA and Jose Mendoza. However, on February 22, 1969, AFWA submitted to the Secretary of Labor in San Francisco an "Agreement and Activities Report" and a "Receipt and Disbursements Report", as required by Section 203 (b) of the Labor Management Reporting and Disclosure Act of 1959 of the United States. From this report it was obvious that

⁶ Ibid.

AWFWA was spawned and financed by several Delano growers. The organization was started as a result of a meeting held at a restaurant in Bakersfield in May of 1968. Present at the meeting were such growers as John Giumarra, Sr., Jack Pandol of Pandol and Sons, representatives of the Di Giorgio Fruit Corporation and Sabovich Bros., Jose Mendoza and others. The meeting was held to outline activities of AFWWA. Several meetings involving many persons, were held but only John Giumarra, Jr., Robert Sabovich, and Jack Pandol gave orders to Mendoza and AFWWA. Among other things, AFWWA was to:

Counterpicket and try to drown out UFWOC pickets whenever they picketed any grape grower, using sound trucks, jeers, etc.

Hold picnics for mass of agricultural workers giving free food, beer, music and raffles to get them to listen to speeches against Chavez and UFWOC. Picket advertisers of the Catholic Register which supported Chavez and UFWOC until John Giumarra told them to stop.

Appear on radio, TV and the news with propaganda against Chavez and UFWOC.

Keep track of all people associated with, and helping UFWOC, using friends, papers, and taking pictures of people in and around UFWOC headquarters. Use all the above methods to get headlines, newspaper and TV coverage with statement that farm workers are not on strike and boycott is just another trick to force the Union on workers.

Mendoza called himself General Secretary and acted as

⁷ Report of Agricultural Workers Freedom to Work Association to Secretary of Labor, February 22, 1969.

chief executive of AFWWA.

Nothing much is known of Mendoza, except that he had previously worked for the National Life Insurance Company in Fresno and the Yellow Cab Company in Bakersfield. For a year and a half he worked for radio station, KWAC in Bakersfield, which is primarily engaged in Mexican-American broadcasting.⁸

The tension of the grape dispute was also felt in the Coachella Valley, located some 125 miles east of Los Angeles. Chavez had called a strike against 12 major grape ranches there, in order to get recognition for the union. The strike began on June 19th, at the peak of the harvest season. However, in early July, Chavez withdrew the pickets from the grape ranches in the Coachella Valley because of increasing violence there. Announcing withdrawal of the pickets, Chavez said that the action was taken with full knowledge that it might look like defeat for the union. He said that the union's "committment to non-violence left it no other choice."⁹

Chavez charged that there had been many incidents of violence by non-strikers against the union pickets and that the local law enforcement office had been unable to provide

⁸Interview with Gerard Sherry, Los Angeles, California, April 23, 1971.

⁹"Chavez Calls Off Picketing Because of Violence", NC News Service, July 5, 1968.

protection. He said that William Richardson, a seminarian at Notre Dame University and a summer volunteer with the union was beaten by supervisors at the Lionel Steinberg ranch in Thermal. Chavez charged that Richardson was so severely beaten that he underwent surgery at Bakersfield Hospital for a broken nose. The union leader said that the withdrawn pickets would be sent East to promote the California boycott of grapes produced by non-union growers.¹⁰

The boycott of non-union table grapes was first used against the Joseph Giumarra Vineyards, Inc., a family corporation which owned more than 12,000 acres, or 19 square miles in Kern and Tulare counties. The Union began a boycott of the Giumarra labels, (Arra, Big G, Grape King, GVC, Honeybunch and Uptown), at which point Giumarra began shipping its produce under the labels of other companies. In January, 1968, the Union began a boycott against all growers of California table grapes not picked on a Union farm. At this point the growers put "Arizona" labels on their grapes, and the boycott was extended to table grapes grown anywhere in the United States.¹¹

The boycott was to prove a very effective weapon for the farm strikers. It was also to receive much support

¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹ Peter Matthiessen, Sal Si Puedes, (New York: Dell Publishing Co., Inc., 1969) pp. 257-258

from churchmen and church-related groups. Late in July, the San Francisco Conference on Religion, Race and Social Concerns called for support of the California grape boycott. The Conference is jointly sponsored by the Archdiocese of San Francisco, the San Francisco Council of Churches, and the Board of Rabbis of Northern California. In a letter sent to religious leaders, the Conference said the absence of collective bargaining for farm workers was the major factor in the "continued exploitation of that segment of our labor force."¹²

At the same time in Detroit, the Human Relations Division of the Archdiocesan Department of Community Affairs announced its support for a drive to exclude California grapes from the shelves of Detroit area retail markets.¹³ Early in August the Catholic Bishops of Michigan asked all Catholic institutions not to use California table grapes as a sign of their support for striking California farm workers. They also expressed the hope that all Michigan citizens would join in the grape boycott.¹⁴

¹²"Interreligious Group Backs Grape Boycott," NC News Service, July 7, 1968, San Francisco, Calif.

¹³Ibid.

¹⁴"Michigan Catholic Conference Asks Grape Boycott," NC News Service, August 3, 1968, Lansing, Mich.

At the same time Bishop John A. Donoyan of Toledo announced his support of striking farm workers. Later in the month Archbishop James V. Casey of Denver did likewise. And in Cincinnati, Ohio, the Archdiocesan Council of Catholic Women announced their support of the grape workers and their efforts to boycott California grapes.¹⁵

The increasing involvement of the Catholic Church in the Farm Labor Dispute was a source of supreme irritation to all of the table-grape growers in California. Monsignor Mahoney estimated that among the major growers, who would number about 80% of the total, more than half were Catholic. Many of the growers in the San Joaquin Valley were Catholic, and they bitterly resented the Church intervening in this particular issue in favor of the claims of the farm laborers. And so they boycotted the local Catholic paper, the Central California Register. Actually, the boycott was initiated by Jose Mendoza, general secretary of the Agricultural Workers Freedom to Work Association. In a letter to all advertisers in the Register, Mendoza charged that the Catholic Church was "helping to promote an illegal boycott against certain California vineyards" and that this action "directly

¹⁵"Women's Group Backs Grape Picker's Strike," NC News Service, August 8, 1968, Cincinnati, Ohio.

threatens our only means of support."¹⁶

In his letter Mendoza said "the discarded and forgotten Catholic farm workers of California earnestly request your assistance in our desperate struggle to restore our right to work as free people in peace and without fear of government, professional agitators, labor organizers, and the Catholic Church."

"We deeply resent the financial backing you are providing the Catholic publication, the Central California Register. As you have probably found out they are in favor of unionizing the agricultural business in this state. This action as you may discover, would be a terrific blow to the vital California economy on which thousands upon thousands of Mexican people are dependent. Disguised as a struggle for human betterment, the United Farm Workers Organizing Committee is being aided by the Catholic bishops of California in the deliberate attempt to destroy our liberty to work. We feel this movement to be contrary to Catholicism and definitely un-American."¹⁷

Gerard E. Sherry, editor of the Register, indicated that attempt at an economic boycott of the diocesan newspaper was merely an additional action to that taken by the growers past years. "Growers have come to my office," Sherry de-

¹⁶ "Threaten to Picket Advertisers in Diocesan Paper," NC News Service, July 23, 1968, Fresno, Calif.

¹⁷ Ibid.

clared, "and personally threatened to put us out of business for daring to suggest that the farm workers have a right to organize into unions. They also suggest that the issues involved in the Delano dispute are legal and political and have no moral angles."¹⁸

But Sherry declared that there was a moral angle involved in the farm labor dispute, and that it was the particular obligation of the religious press to help lead the civic community in the formation of standards of morality and in the furthering of social and civic justice. And Sherry made a statement which has a familiar ring for anyone who has emphasized the social implications of the Gospels. "If we run an editorial," he said, "in support of anti-smut legislation or if we publicize somebody who advocates anti-communism, we are lauded as a truly Christian newspaper. But let us comment on the rights and duties involved in social justice, or on the war on poverty, or on the eradication of slums, or on a just wage, and immediately we are labeled socialistic or communistic, and we are informed that these are not the problems of the Church."¹⁹

¹⁸ Ibid.

¹⁹ "Council of Churches Backs Catholic Paper", NC News Service, August 6, 1968, Fresno, Calif.

Archbishop Manning admitted that the boycott of the Central California Register was "injurious". He said "most of the advertisers were solicited to withdraw their patronage of the paper or else suffer the consequence. And most of the advertisers, with the exception of one or two, did that."²⁰ Gerard Sherry was more specific. In testimony given to the Congressional Subcommittee on the Delano Farm Labor Dispute at the Delano High School, on August 15, 1968, Sherry told of the harassment and threats that firms, which advertised in the Central California Register had received. He claimed that the advertisements in the Easter edition of that year had declined considerably. "While we cannot positively prove that the financial decline of the Easter ads was a direct result of grower and farmer discontent with our coverage of Chavez," Sherry testified, "the fact remains that in 1967 we collected for this special (and apart from weekly retail advertising) the sum of \$31,713.50. This year our total for Easter ads came to \$3,881.75."²¹ Sherry told the subcommittee that as a result of the AFWWA picketing and threats against advertisers, advertising in the paper was at its lowest point in twenty years. He claimed that al-

²⁰ Interview with Archbishop Manning, April 1, 1971.

²¹ "Editor is Witness at Farm-Labor Hearing," NC News Service, August 17, 1968, Delano, Calif.

ready that year more than \$20,000 of revenue had been lost from firms and individuals who would normally support special editions. The Good Will issue, published August 15th, had been a colossal financial failure.²²

Though Sherry lost considerable financial support for his paper, he received strong moral support for his stand. In the same month the Fresno Council of Churches issued a statement which declared that they considered the editorial stand of the Central California Register on the farm labor problem to be eminently fair. The statement concluded, "We find the editorial policies of the Register to be fair and journalistically speaking excellent." The statement called Gerry Sherry, "a man of responsible integrity."²³ The following month the Catholic Press Association issued a statement in which they deplored the efforts made to intimidate the Central California Register and its advertisers because of the stand it had taken in defense of the striking farm workers. The CPA statement called the Register "an outstanding Catholic newspaper," and it emphasized, "Open news reporting, free editorial expression and uninhibited advertising are essential elements of the free press, which is one of the cornerstones of the American society. The Register's

²²Ibid.

²³"Council of Churches Backs Catholic Paper," NC News Service, August 6, 1968, Fresno, Calif.

struggle today is another phase in the long history of a free and honest press."²⁴

Sherry's nationally distributed articles obviously made many aware of the plight of the farm worker. And the Catholic hierarchy were becoming aware not only of their responsibilities to the farm worker but to the whole Mexican and American communities. Many factors contributed to the changing attitude of the hierarchy, but the primary factor was the general upsurge and articulation of needs by the Spanish speaking community itself. Chavez sensed this change in attitude and now abandoned a position of 'restrained rhetoric' and openly challenged the Church. Since he was now a recognized leader in the Spanish-speaking community, the Church's hierarchy could no longer ignore those challenges.

²⁴

"CPA Scores Intimidation of Catholic Paper in Farm Workers Strike," NC News Service, September 11, 1968, New York.

CHAPTER V

U. S. BISHOPS ENTER FARM LABOR DISPUTE

On November 14th, 1968, the Catholic Bishops of the United States met at Washington, D. C., for one of their semi-annual conferences. Among the many items for discussion, the subject of the Farm Labor Dispute was probably the most pressing. And since the problem, which had begun in California, had spread throughout the nation, it had now become a national problem. The American Bishops, consequently addressed themselves to this problem. They issued a statement, in which they made recommendations both for the farm worker and the grower. With regard to the farm worker they declared:

For thirty years the disadvantaged field workers of this nation have stood by helplessly and listened to other Americans debating the farm labor problem. Burdened by low wage scales, mounting health problems, inadequate educational opportunities, substandard housing, and lack of year-round employment, they have often been forced to live a life devoid of security, dignity, and reasonable comfort. For the past three years, however, many of them have been attempting to take their destiny into their own hands. This is a very healthy development.¹

¹"Farm Workers. U. S. Bishops Statement," NC News Service, November 25, 1968, Washington, D. C.

The Bishops also expressed their sympathy for the growers and farmers, who they said were also finding themselves "in a sea of difficulties." The Bishops cited some of these difficulties - mounting costs, foreign competition, water shortages and many other problems. But they expressed intense sympathy for the small grower, or so-called 'independent farm'. Of him they said:

We are aware that the small grower is often the victim of circumstances beyond his control, and that his sincere willingness to pay higher wages meets with obstacles which he cannot overcome without a realistic coordination of all his strength. We urge him to examine his situation carefully in order to see that his so-called independence is unreal and could result in his vanishing from the American economy. We believe that this would be tragic for our country. To protect himself, his interests, and the interests of the farm workers, we plead with him to unite with his fellow-farmers and growers in associations proper to themselves.²

The Conference of Bishops at Washington noted that many Catholic Bishops in several states most deeply affected by the farm labor crisis had already addressed themselves to the need for federal legislation to provide machinery for the peaceful settlement of disputes between growers and farm workers. They added their support to the position taken by these individual Bishops and appealed to the 91st Congress to provide legislation necessary to protect the rights of the farm workers and to provide the peace and stability so essential to the well being and prosperity

²Ibid.

of the agricultural industry. Specifically they asked Congress to enact legislation:

- 1) To include farm workers under the National Labor Relations Act,
- 2) To include farm workers more effectively under a national minimum wage which will insure them a decent standard of living,
- 3) To include farm workers under the national unemployment insurance program.³

The U. S. Bishops also drew attention to the fact that the Second Vatican Council had re-affirmed the traditional teaching of the Church with regard to the right of the workers to organize and bargain collectively and, under certain conditions, to resort to the strike. They also declared that they addressed themselves to the farm labor problem "with the high hope of assisting in a reconciliation between grower and worker."⁴

The noteworthy thing about the Bishops' statement was that it made no mention of the boycott. Bishop Donohoe testifies that at this time there were many efforts made to have the Catholic Bishops of the country uphold the legitimacy of the grape boycott and make that, as it

³Ibid.

⁴Ibid.

were, a key to their statement. Both Bishop Donohoe and Bishop Manning were opposed to this idea because they were acquainted with many of the growers, and consequently were aware of their problems. In their judgment, if the Bishops were going to put out a statement, it was necessary that they should say something positive that could be applied to both sides and avoid the subject of the boycott. For them, a positive program was endorsed by the Bishops, when they called for the implementation of the right to organize and asked that the farm workers be included under the National Labor Relations Act, the national minimum wage law, and the national unemployment insurance program. As Bishop Donohoe stated it, "The end product was a positive with no red flags in it that would raise the hackles of the farmers causing them to say, 'you are against us, like the rest of them.' Our object as bishops was to build a bridge. That is our basic function and it isn't always easy to keep that stance. Some people think if you try to take that posture you are compromising, you are afraid to face up to the issues. I think, on the whole, it is a lot more difficult to try to maintain the position of bridge building, than to go off and be on one side or the other."⁵ Bishop

⁵Bishop Hugh A. Donohoe, "Labor Union's Right to Exist," The Catholic Voice, Stockton, Calif. September 24, 1969. Sec. 1, p. 1.

Donohoe also found it very significant that the bishops did not condemn the boycott. "If the boycott was something evil," he said, "we would be bound in conscience to say it was wrong, to say it is not merely unlawful but also immoral. But we didn't say that. The boycott certainly has not been condemned by the Bishops and that fact is something to take into consideration."⁶

Though the Bishops, as a body, did not endorse the table-grape boycott, some individual Bishops did, and innumerable priests and nuns engaged actively in the boycott. In January of 1969, Monsignor Philip J. Kenney, Vicar for Community Affairs and Chairman of the Commission of Human Relations of the Manchester Diocese, and the Reverend Gardner Day, Chairman of the New Hampshire Council of Churches' social action Commission, issued on January 8th a joint statement supporting farm workers engaged in a strike and boycott against California growers of table grapes.⁷

Late in March the newly formed Cleveland Conference of Priests gave its endorsement of the California grape boycott. At the same time, an agency of the Pittsburgh Diocese, the Fund for the Aid of Neighbors in Need, awarded

⁶ Ibid.

⁷ "Church Groups Support California Grape Growers," NC News Service, January 9, 1969, Manchester, N. H.

a grant of \$1,500 to provide "promotional materials" to the United Farm Workers' grape boycott in the Pittsburgh area. Shortly afterwards the Senate of Priests of the Davenport Diocese joined the nationwide boycott of California table grapes. This Senate urged local councils in the 119 parishes of the Diocese, which comprises the southeast part of Iowa, to support the grape boycott "to help farm workers in that industry obtain justice."⁸

In May the Senate of Priests of the Newark Archdiocese endorsed the boycott, and voted to send a memorandum to Congress and to the State legislature asking for the enactment of laws to protect the rights of farm workers to organize, and to receive a living wage.⁹

Many priests and nuns joined with civic groups when the latter engaged in efforts to promote the boycott. One such was Father Stanislaus Pack, director of the Cleveland Diocesan Spanish Mission Office. He, along with twelve other people, engaged in a sit-in on July 7 at offices of Atlantic and Pacific national produce division in suburban Maple Heights. They declared they would remain "until all Calif-

⁸"Iowa Priests Support Grape Boycott," NC News Service, April 1, 1969, Davenport, Iowa.

⁹"Priests Back Grape Boycott," NC News Service, May 8, 1969, Newark, New Jersey.

ornia grapes are removed from all A&P stores in the Cleveland area."¹⁰ However the sit-in was later called off.

In Bay City, Michigan, a number of people engaged in a 13-mile 'silent' march in support of the California grape pickers. They were accompanied by two priests, Father James Miller and Father Alan Vejtech, and a number of nuns. The group marched from St. Hedwig's Church in Bay City to Sacred Heart Church in Saginaw, in a silent plea to the public to stop buying California table grapes.¹¹ Among the individual Bishops who added their names to the list supporting the grape boycott, were Cardinal Richard Cushing of Boston, Bishop Francis F. Reh of Saginaw, Bishop James W. Malone of Youngstown, Ohio and Archbishop Robert E. Lucey of San Antonio, Texas.

On April 17, 1969, the American Bishops met at Houston, Texas, and the question of the farm labor dispute was again raised. As a result of the discussion a telegram was sent to Vice President Spiro T. Agnew, president of the U. S. Senate, and John W. McCormack, Speaker of the House of Representatives, on the subject of the farm labor crisis.

¹⁰"Stage Sit-In at Office, Want No Grapes Sold,"
NC News Service, July 10, 1969, Cleveland, Ohio.

¹¹"Silent March in Michigan Supports Grape Boycott,"
NC News Service, August 8, 1969, Bay City, Michigan.

The telegram was signed by Cardinal-designate John F. Deardon, Chairman, Administrative Board, United States Catholic Conference, and Cardinal-designate John J. Wright, Chairman, USCC Departmental Committee on Social Development. The telegram read as follows:

The farm workers strike now enters its fourth year. Justice and promised legislation are delayed. Boycott not way for speedy solution but now considered by the workers as their only strategy to awaken conscience of the nation. Catholic Bishops of the United States convened in Houston urge present Congress to extend NLRA to agricultural workers. Right to organize must be realistically vindicated. The end of the current chaos requires action on your part. The restoration of good will and order will redound to the benefit of growers, workers and the public at large.¹²

This action of the Bishops drew praise from George Meany, president of the American Federation of Labor and Congress of Industrial Organizations. In a telegram, sent to Cardinal-designate Deardon, he expressed his appreciation for the support the farm workers had already received from the Bishops. He also urged the Catholic Bishops to help settle the long farm workers' strike. Meany believed that there was a "possibility that third-party intervention with the grape growers could be of value in achieving a just peace in the grape fields." He also concluded that: "Recognition by the employ-

¹²"Telegram Sent to Congress by U. S. Bishops on Farm Labor", (Press Release of U. S. Catholic Conference, April 21, 1969), Documentary Service.

ers of the workers' fundamental rights to a union of their own choosing and to bargain collectively would end the struggle." On this basis he urged the Bishops to use their good offices to persuade the grape growers to adopt a sense of social responsibility and treat their employees as human beings. Meany emphasized: "We stand ready to meet at any time in any place with any group of farm owners you could convene for the purpose of achieving an honorable end to this struggle."¹³ Thus organized labor, of which many leaders were Catholic, threw its awesome power behind Chavez.

Many Catholics, along with George Meany, were anxious that the Catholic Bishops of the United States would actively enter the fray and give positive support to Chavez in his efforts to organize the farm workers. But many other Catholics were opposed to any such intervention and deeply resented the proposal that the California Bishops intervene in the affair. These Catholics found two Jesuit priests to champion their cause. They were Father Daniel Lyons and Father Cletus Healy, editor and contributing editor, respectively, of the Twin Circle. The Twin Circle is a leading conservative paper among five major national newspapers aimed at Catholic leadership. All are published independently and are not under the control of the Catholic hierarchy. The Twin Circle is owned by the Schick

¹³"Meany Urges Catholic Bishops to Help Settle Farm Workers' Strike", NC News Service, April 20, 1969, Washington, D. C.

Investment Co., which is controlled by politically conservative Patrick J. Frawley, Jr.

Starting in October of 1968 Father Healy wrote a series of anti-boycott and anti-Chavez articles which were all pulled together in an illustrated booklet entitled, "Battle for the Vineyards." Father Healy's articles consistently followed the same themes, namely that the workers in California were the highest paid in the nation; that most of the farm workers did not want Chavez or the union; that Chavez was a troublemaker rather than a crusader, and that many men of the media had distorted the Delano picture. And Father Healy seemed to suggest that there were Communist influences in the Chavez movement. In particular Father Healy drew attention to the fact that Chavez was under the "sinister" influence of Saul Alinsky. Concerning the two men he wrote:

From studying the two men, it is evident that the Alinsky influence on Cesar Chavez has been considerable. But is it Communist? There is more than enough evidence to warrant the question, but most people have fallen short of calling Alinsky a Communist. After watching Alinsky's recent performance at Syracuse University, however, the Mayor of Syracuse complained that Alinsky's function in their War on Poverty program seemed to be to "train agitators" and to teach Marxist doctrines of class conflicts. I read Alinsky's Reveille for Radicals. I saw nothing in the book that would contradict the Mayor's analysis. I saw much that would corroborate-- very much. In my opinion, there is much about Chavez's conduct to betray an Alinsky influence.¹⁴

¹⁴ Rev. Cletus Healy, S.J., Battle for the Vineyards, (New York: Twin Circle Publishing Company, 1969), p. 33.

The above paragraph, in particular, and the booklet, in general, drew a rebuttal from Monsignor George Higgins, Director of the Social Action Department of the National Catholic Welfare Conference. In his weekly syndicated column, "The Yardstick," Monsignor Higgins drew attention to the above paragraph and quoted it as an example of the "totally reprehensible rhetorical methods" used by Father Healy to smear Chavez and his associates. Monsignor Higgins had a personal reason for replying to Father Healy's booklet. In the introduction to the booklet, Father Daniel Lyons had charged that Monsignor Higgins had been "leading Catholics to believe that every union operates on the highest principles of justice, represents the vast majority of workers in any industry, and has the good of the workers at heart above all else. This is sometimes not the case."¹⁵

In his rebuttal, Monsignor Higgins charged that Healy and Lyons were opposed not only to this organizing effort, but also to organizing farm workers under any and all conditions.¹⁶

Monsignor Higgins was no stranger to labor-management problems. During his twenty-five years with the Social Action

¹⁵ Ibid., p. 2

¹⁶ Monsignor George S. Higgins, "The Yardstick," Released by National Catholic News Service, September 15, 1969.

Department he had gained a reputation as a specialist in labor-management relations. He was also well-versed in the problems of farm labor. Earlier in January, 1968 he had accepted an invitation from the Florida State Legislature to act as an advisor to a fact-finding committee which was set up to study Florida's migrant labor problems. On January 24, he was one of three persons named to a government fact-finding board to help end a six month nationwide copper strike. The three men were appointed by Labor Secretary Willard Wirtz and Commerce Secretary Alexander Trowbridge.¹⁷

In May of 1968 he was asked by the Mayor of Washington, D. C., to mediate in a dispute between busdrivers and the Washington, D. C. Transit Company. In the wake of a growing wave of bus robberies, night drivers, supported by their union, had refused to carry money to make change. The company had not allowed them to drive buses without change money. Monsignor Higgins developed the "Exact Fare" plan, which has now spread to numerous cities and has saved the lives of many bus drivers, who no longer carry change and thus are no "marks" for robbery at every stop they make. Passengers

¹⁷ "Monsignor George S. Higgins on Fact-finding Board", N.C. News Service, January 26, 1968, Washington, D. C.

must place the exact fare in the coin box, which can be opened only at Transit headquarters.¹⁸

Monsignor Higgin's academic background also prepared him for his role as mediator in labor-management disputes. Originally a priest of the Chicago archdiocese, he was sent by his Bishop to the Catholic University in Washington, D.C., in 1940. From 1940 to 1944 he did graduate studies in Economics and Political Science. During those years he listened to lectures of the famous Monsignor John A. Ryan. He received a Ph.D. from the same university in 1944 and his doctoral thesis was "Voluntarism in Organized Labor in the United States, 1930-1940." Time has proved that he is a worthy successor of Monsignor John A. Ryan, as head of the Social Action Department. He was also to play a very important role in the farm labor dispute.¹⁹

On November 14, 1969 the Catholic Bishops of the United States again assembled at Washington, D.C., for their semi-annual meeting there. There was a great deal of discussion, both behind the scenes, and on the floor, concerning the desirability or the non-desirability of a statement from all the Bishops supporting the grape boycott. Monsignor George

¹⁸"Monsignor Higgins Named to Mediate Bus Dispute", NC News Service, May 24, 1968, Washington, D. C.

¹⁹Interview with Monsignor Higgins, January 29, 1971.

Higgins was present at the conference. He and his associates were very much in favor of a statement endorsing the boycott. In fact, Monsignor Higgins had prepared a statement of endorsement, which he hoped the Bishops would adopt. "We felt," Monsignor Higgins declared, "that since almost every other major religious group in the United States - Protestant groups - had already stated their position on the boycott, it looked a little sad for the national leadership of our Church to be silent on the issue, particularly in view of the fact that in California, at least, the overwhelming majority of farm workers are of Mexican origin, and are therefore, at least nominally, Catholic."²⁰

Bishop Manning tells us what happened. "When it came to a showdown at the Bishops' meeting, then I, being closest to the problem, and knowing the consequences, asked for the floor and begged the hierarchy not to endorse the boycott. Bishop Donohoe followed me and made a similar plea. I felt that if the Bishops endorsed the boycott, it would immediately polarize the growers and the workers, and there would be no chance of bridging the gap between the two. A number of other religious bodies had already endorsed the boycott, and immediately they were rendered useless so far as making any contact between the growers and the workers. And if there

²⁰ Ibid., January 29, 1971.

was to be any kind of a bridge between both groups, we had to avoid the boycott."²¹

As in 1968, at the request of Archbishop Manning and Bishop Donohoe - almost at their insistence - the general body of Bishops agreed not to issue a statement in support of the boycott. But instead they established a committee, a five-man committee of Bishops, which was charged with the responsibility of moving out to California to determine whether or not there was anything that could be done to mediate the dispute. Monsignor Higgins was not very happy with the decision of the Bishops. He had a frank discussion with Manning and Donohoe. He told them that he did not agree with the position, but would naturally go along with it. Later, however, he admitted that the two Bishops were right. He said almost a year later, "it was providential, very providential that Manning and Donohoe won the argument and that I lost. Because, had the Bishops at that time, issued a strong statement in support of the boycott I think it would have meant inevitably that their usefulness as an outside conciliation or mediation service, or agency, would have been destroyed. It would have been impossible for any group of Bishops after that to come to the growers and say: "Well, why don't you sit down with us and see if we can work something out with the union." The

²¹ Interview with Archbishop Manning, January 29, 1971

growers would naturally say: "Well, you already committed yourselves; you are not neutral and you have taken a prejudiced position on the issue and we have no interest in talking to you."²²

At the end of the meeting of the Bishops, Cardinal John Deardon of Detroit, president of the Conference, sent a telegram to the Table Grape Growers Negotiating Committee based in Los Alamitos, California, in which he urged the growers to submit their case to the Federal Mediation and Conciliation Service. He also added, "We have set up an ad hoc committee to continue the study of the strike and the body of Bishops has empowered this committee to issue appropriate statements as their estimation of the facts warrant."²³ The reference to the ad hoc committee, in the telegram of Cardinal Deardon, indicates the extraordinary power that was given this particular committee. In practice it meant that any statement made by the Bishops' Ad Hoc Committee on Farm Labor would be a statement made in the name of the entire American hierarchy without necessity of prior consultation. So whatever the committee said or did, it spoke or acted in the name of the entire hierarchy and did not have

²²Interview with Monsignor Higgins, January 29, 1971.

²³"Bishops Strive to End Grape Workers Strike", NC News Service, November 14, 1969, Washington, D.C.

to go back in advance for consultation with either the President of the Conference, or the board. It had a 'carte blanche' to go ahead on its own initiative. This gave the committee a standing in the community, among the growers and with the union, that helped its work immensely. Monsignor noted that such a range of jurisdiction and competence had never been given to any other Bishops' committee before.²⁴

Cardinal Deardon chose the five Bishops who were to constitute the Bishops' Ad Hoc Committee on Farm Labor. They were: Archbishop Timothy Manning, then Coadjutor Archbishop of Los Angeles; Bishop Donohoe of Fresno; Bishop Walter W. Curtis of Bridgeport, Connecticut; Bishop Humberto S. Medeiros of Brownsville, Texas; and Bishop Joseph F. Donnelly, Auxiliary Bishop of Hartford, Connecticut. As one can tell from the listing, the members were chosen with geography in mind -- two from California and one from Texas. In both states there are big concentrations of farm workers. Bishop Curtis was chosen because he was, at that time, chairman of the Division of Urban life of the United States Catholic Conference. And Bishop Donnelly was picked because of his expertise in the field. Bishop Donnelly re-

²⁴ Interview with Monsignor Higgins, January 29, 1971.

quested that Monsignor Higgins serve as consultant to the committee. And it was so ordered.²⁵

Bishop Donnelly was chosen as chairman of the committee at the request of the California Bishops, who felt it would be better to have an outsider as chairman who could "take a more independent stand without offending local interests."²⁶ They also had a respect for his professional competence in the field, which is unexcelled, certainly, in the ranks of the American clergy. In 1942, when he was a young parish priest in industrialized Waterbury, he was appointed by his Bishop as the head of the newly-established Diocesan Labor Institute. He headed the Diocesan Labor Institute in its task of promoting labor-management understanding until 1964, when he was appointed auxiliary Bishop to the Archbishop of Hartford. During those years he participated in efforts to resolve more than 2,000 labor-management disputes, as mediator or arbitrator. He was a member of the Connecticut State Board of Mediation and Arbitration for twenty one years. Originally named to the board by Governor Raymond E. Baldwin in 1943, he was re-appointed by succeeding governors. He was named chairman of the board in 1949 and

25 Ibid.

26 Ibid.

served in that capacity until his resignation in 1964. When he was reappointed by Governor Abraham Ribicoff, the Governor commented, "I doubt that any other state is blessed with so capable and understanding a man in a post of this position." At the time of his appointment as chairman of the Bishops' Ad Hoc Committee, he was chairman of the sub-committee of Urban Life of the Department of Social Development.²⁷

The official Catholic Church was now deeply involved in the farm labor dispute, to the great joy of Catholic liberals and to the consternation and chagrin of Catholic conservatives. It established somewhat of a precedent, because normally this kind of problem would not be handled by the body of bishops as a whole, but would be left up to the various departments. However, in the case of the Farm Labor Dispute, the problem had become so serious, and it had such national implications, that it had to be handled by the body of bishops. And the Ad Hoc Committee, appointed by the bishops, was to have enormous influence on the course of events of the farm labor dispute and the Church itself was to undergo change because of its participation in the dispute.

²⁷"Grape Strike Arbitrator Experienced as 'Oiler'".
Los Angeles Tidings, August 7, 1970. Sec. 1, p. 3.

CHAPTER VI

THE TIDE TURNS

In December of 1969, Bishop Donnelly moved out to California and stayed with Bishop Donohoe in Fresno. There Bishop Donnelly met Monsignor Mahoney, and together they started laying the groundwork for future negotiations between growers and farm workers. By telephone and telegram they tried to contact various groups of growers in the Coachella Valley, Fresno Country and growers in the Lemont and Arvin areas. They tried to get them together in groups, either according to the area they were living in, or according to the crop-growing they were engaged in. The response varied. The growers in the Delano area promised to send a delegation, which would represent all of the growers in that area. The growers in the Coachella Valley initially declared they would not meet with the Bishops' Committee at any time. And in other areas the response was only twenty to thirty percent in favor of meeting with the Committee.¹

Nevertheless, Bishop Donnelly was heartened by this response, so he requested the other members of the Bishops' Ad Hoc Committee to meet at Fresno on February 10th. The entire Committee convened at Fresno and held meetings with

¹Interview with Monsignor Mahoney, Feb. 16, 1971.

the Executive Board of the United Farm Workers Organizing Committee and with representatives of some of the growers. Only a few growers were present, but the Union Committee were friendly and frank and welcomed the intervention of the Bishops' Committee. Throughout the day, the Bishops met with the parties separately and in joint sessions. The meetings, on the whole, were friendly, but neither constructive nor encouraging.²

However, a number of events occurred which gave the Bishops' Committee new heart. The day after the scheduled meetings at Fresno, the Bishops' Committee had an off the record meeting with a man, whom Bishop Donnelly described as "one of the important growers involved in the farm workers dispute." He welcomed the intervention of the Bishops' Committee, gave them much information, and encouraged them to hold another meeting and again invite growers to attend. Also, on March 9th, Bishop Donnelly and Monsignor Higgins met in Washington with the Secretary of Labor and the Director of the Federal Mediation and Conciliation Service. Later the same day they met with George Meany, President of the AFL-CIO. These conferences proved very helpful, particularly since Mr. Meany gave his assurance that the AFL-CIO would be willing to countersign any

²From the report of the Ad Hoc Committee to the U. S. Bishops at San Francisco. April 21, 1970.

contract negotiated with the table grape growers.³

Encouraged by these events, some members of the Committee spent some time in the early part of March visiting some forty growers, individually and in small groups, in various parts of the Central Valley. Some were hostile, some were friendly, and some were enthusiastic about the active intervention of the Church in the dispute. On March 23, the Committee convened in Fresno for a second meeting with the growers. Twelve growers attended the meeting, together with an attorney, who represented an undetermined number of other growers. In the forenoon, the Bishops' Committee met separately with the union and the growers. The Bishops then invited the growers to meet with the union in a joint session in the afternoon. Only one grower refused to meet with the union. The meeting, in question, was friendly and it was obvious that there was a disposition, on the part of some, to sit down with the union and try to work out their problems. By the end of the day representatives of three ranches were ready to sit down and negotiate contracts.⁴

The three ranches in question were the David Freed-

³ Ibid.

⁴ Ibid.

man Company of Thermal and Indio; the Wonder Palms Ranch, partially owned by Freedman Company; and the Travertine Ranch owned by Charles Freedman in Oasis. The three ranches were represented by Lionel Steinberg, president of the David Freedman Packing Company. Steinberg, along with several members of his family, had complete or partial control of all three ranches. He asked that a representative of the Bishops' Committee sit in on the negotiations. On March 25, the parties met for a full day of negotiations at Palm Springs. The next meeting was scheduled for Monday, March 30, at the International Hotel in Los Angeles. The meeting continued until 3 on Tuesday morning at which time the parties had reached an agreement. The Bishops' Committee then suggested to the parties that the settlement be announced at a press conference on Wednesday. When the place of the conference was being discussed, the union suggested the Archdiocesan Chancery Office, and the growers readily agreed. Archbishop Manning called a press conference, and the announcement was made before over 100 representatives of the news media.
⁵

It was not a very big contract. The growers in-

⁵Ibid.

volved produced one-eighth of the Coachella table grape crop and about 1% of the total California crop. Some 750 workers out of a total union membership of 22,000 were covered by the contract. It was, however, a very important contract. The agreement was the nation's first labor contract covering grape pickers. Archbishop Manning expressed the hope that it would be "the beginning of a chain of such contracts."⁶ Bishop Donnelly was confident that such a breakthrough would "serve as a pattern for others who wish to help solve the prolonged dispute." Members of the Bishops' Committee gave high praise to Lionel Steinberg for his courage in breaking the ranks of the growers, who had until that time refused to negotiate with the United Farm Workers Organizing Committee.⁷

The settlement between the growers and the union called for a three-year contract with wages set at \$1.70 an hour plus a picking bonus for 25 cents per box. In addition, the growers agreed to a 10-cent per hour contribution to an economic development fund operated by the union for workers too sick or too old to work. The

⁶Gerard E. Sherry, "Farm Workers Union, Growers Sign First Table Grape Contract," NC News Service, April 2, 1970, Los Angeles, California

⁷Ibid.

growers also agreed to pay their workers who might be called for jury or witness duty. The contract also prohibited the growers from using six so-called hard pesticides, including DDT.⁸

Steinberg expressed some doubts as to whether the contract would work or not. He declared, "I have some concern that it may not be completely workable, but I am convinced that I will try, and that the union will try."⁹ He also added that the grape growers had been suffering a steady financial loss, partly as a result of a business recession and partly due to the success of the union's nationwide grape boycott. He also praised the work of the Bishops' Committee. He said that "the Bishops' Committee had a significant role in our efforts to reach agreement with the union. I doubt we could have arrived at an equitable solution without their counsel and encouragement."¹⁰

Chavez also had high praise for the Bishops' Com-

⁸ Ibid.

⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰ Gerard E. Sherry, "Breakthrough Made in Grape Dispute," Central California Register, April 3, 1970, p. 1.

mittee and said that the union intended to do everything possible to make the agreement work, for the benefit of both sides. But he made it clear that strike activity would be intensified against the table grape growers in the Coachella Valley who still refused to bargain with the union. He said that a special label for union-picked grapes had been designed and would be used by the firms covered by the contract. The UFWOC leader said his organization would help promote the table grapes of the firms accepting the union.

Chavez noted that although the agreements did not equal contracts signed earlier with wine grape growers, he said that the table grape growers' recognition of the union represented an essential victory. He told newsmen, "This is a very important day. Some people have charged for the last five years that the workers do not want contracts, that they only want to ruin the industry. I think we're disproving that today. The union will be watching the other growers to see if they resisted contracts. If that's the case they can be charged with trying to destroy the union."¹¹

Bishop Donnelly asserted: "The role of the Bishops'

¹¹Gerard E. Sherry, "Farm Workers Union, Growers Sign First Table Grape Contract," NC News Service, April 2, 1970. Los Angeles, Calif. p. 22.

Committee has been essentially one of bringing together the parties who have been divided in a dispute which has lasted some five years and has left in its wake much anguish and strife and bitterness for all concerned."¹² Later that month on April 21, Bishop Donnelly gave a report of the activities of the Committee, to the U. S. Bishops, assembled at San Francisco for their semi-annual conference. He told the Bishops, "Amazing to us was the scanty communication which the growers have with one another, and the almost total lack of communication they have with the union. Only a few have ever met Cesar Chavez, or even seen him. During almost five years of strife, growers in the Delano area, where the union headquarters is, have never met Chavez. As in the early days of industrial organization they are convinced that their workers are very happy and do not want a union. Those workers we talked to felt quite to the contrary, but of course they tell the growers what they know the growers want to hear."¹³ He also told the Bishops that many growers were favorably

¹²Ibid.

¹³From Report of the Bishops' Ad Hoc Committee on the Farm Labor Dispute to the U.S. Bishops at San Francisco, April 21, 1970.

impressed with the terms of the first table grape contract, and while it was too dangerous to forecast anything, he felt that there were many favorable developments ahead. Bishop Donnelly also recommended that in view of "the current constructive developments", the Bishops take no action on the boycott at that time.¹⁴

Chavez and his union intensified strike activity against the table grape growers in the Coachella Valley, who still refused to bargain with the union. The boycott of non-union grapes not only continued, but was stepped up throughout the country. Though the American Bishops did not endorse the boycott, numerous Catholic clergymen continued to do so. On June 8, 1970, the San Francisco Archdiocesan Senate of Priests, representing 800 priests, voted to endorse the boycott. The Senate statement declared, "The time has come to back up, with effective action, the official statements of Church support for the rights of the farm workers."¹⁵

The Catholic Church in America now was not only aware of its obligations to the farm worker, but also was becoming increasingly aware of the needs of the en-

¹⁴Ibid.

¹⁵Harry Bernstein, "Growers Snub Bishops in Farm Labor Dispute," Los Angeles Times, June 13, 1970. Part 2, p. 10.

tire Spanish-speaking members of its flock, which comprised one-fourth of the total membership. In the United States some 12 million inhabitants are Spanish-speaking, and it has been estimated that 90 per cent of these are Catholic.¹⁶

One example of this new trend in the Church, was the consecration in May 1970 of the nation's first Mexican-American bishop, Most Rev. Patrick F. Flores, as Auxiliary to Archbishop Francis J. Furey of San Antonio. In his youth, Patrick Fernandez Flores picked cotton as a migratory farm worker in Texas. He lived with his parents and his eight brothers and sisters in sheds and barns on the outskirts of the farm towns between Corpus Christi and Amarillo. He was a close friend of Cesar Chavez. When he was consecrated at the Convention Center Arena in San Antonio, Chavez was among the 8,000 worshipers present. Chavez later told a reporter from the San Antonio Express that the consecration of Bishop Flores was a "miracle" and a "recognition of the Mexican-American Catholic." He spoke of his warm friendship with Flores and voiced the hope that the Bishop's elevation

¹⁶ Interview with Father Victor Salindini, February 16, 1971.

"will be the first of several for Mexican-Americans in the Southwest."¹⁷

Later that month, on May 21st, UFWOC reached an agreement with two major growers in the San Joaquin Valley, the Bianco Fruit Corporation and Bruno Dispoto. The contracts were important as they covered about 2,000 workers on farms annually producing 1.1 million boxes of table grapes grown mostly in California, as it included a farm in Arizona. Bishop Donnelly, Bishop Donohoe and Monsignor Higgins sat in on the final days of contract negotiations. Bishop Donnelly said that the two contracts "represent genuine progress" and gave him reason to hope that the bitter dispute in the table grape industry would be resolved "on the basis of sound social principles, and to the mutual benefit of the parties and of the agricultural industry as a whole."¹⁸

Chavez was appreciative of the work done by the Bishops' Committee. In an address to 250 religious and lay leaders at an interfaith meeting in Delano on June 8th he said that a large measure of the success

¹⁷ Father Mark Day, Forty Acres, (New York: Praeger Publishers, 1971), pp. 123, 124.

¹⁸ Bishop Joseph F. Donnelly, Press Release, May 21, 1970. Fresno, Calif.

of the recent contracts with growers in the Coachella and San Joaquin Valleys was due to the mediation efforts of the U. S. Bishops' Committee. However, he was sharply critical of the fact that the Bishops did not get involved much sooner. "In the five years of the struggle since the strike began, the church - even our own - has stood aside or supported the growers against the workers. And if it wasn't for the migrant ministry under the leadership of Rev. Chris Hartmire of Los Angeles, the strike would have failed long ago. The union would have been defeated." He also told the leaders: "The clergy do not realize their powers. Signing their name to a statement of support is not enough. It doesn't count among the workers. Only the activist clergy can have influence in the social message of the gospels."¹⁹

The Bishops' Committee continued to assist 'actively' in settling the farm labor dispute. On June 10, UFWOC signed another contract with the Robert Farms, Inc., of McFarland, California, whose combined properties totalled approximately 48,000 acres and covered 19 diverse crops, including 600 acres of table grapes. The Bishops' Committee at the invitation of the company and the union, participated in the negotiations. Bishop Donnelly called it "the

¹⁹Gerard E. Sherry, "Churches Must Do More For Farm Workers Chavez Says," NC News Service, June 8, 1970, Delano, California.

most important single labor-management agreement ever arrived at in the history of American agriculture." The Bishops' Committee were favorably impressed by the constructive and conciliatory approach of the growers and the union.²⁰

Not all went smoothly for the Bishops' Committee, however. When they moved into Imperial Valley, with the hope of bringing about a settlement of a strike between unionized farm workers and melon growers in the border area, they met with stiff opposition. Thus when they visited the Ben Abatti Farms, the largest grower in the Imperial Valley, which had agreed to negotiate with the union, they met Agnes Abatti, sister of the grower, who ordered them off the property and told them, "You should be teaching religion and should stay out of the farm labor problems."²¹

Later the members of the Bishops' Committee went along to the headquarters of the Growers' Association in the hope of getting some factual materials, possible news hand-outs, or whatever views the growers might wish to express. However, they were told very bluntly, by an official spokesman for the Growers' Association, that they would get no such

²⁰Bishop Donnelly, From Statement at Press Conference at El Centro, Calif. June 11, 1970.

²¹"Bishops' Committee Rebuffed by Growers in Strike," NC News Service, June 15, 1970, Calexico, Calif. p. 22

information, and that the Growers' Association would not participate in any discussion of the dispute with representatives of the Bishops' Committee. The motel, where the group were staying, was picketed by young people, hired by the growers, with signs reading, "Catholic Bishops Go Home."²²

Despite this set-back, the Bishops' Committee continued to make themselves available to all parties. On June 26, over 11,500 acres of grapes were added to UFWOC coverage in a number of contracts signed with two companies, the Tenneco Corporation, one of the largest conglomerates in the United States, and S. A. Camp, a huge San Joaquin Valley grower. Both companies asked and received the active and necessary mediation services of representatives of the Bishops' Committee.²³

UFWOC also was the victor in a re-run of an election with workers on 33 small farms in the Coachella Valley. The workers voted 168 to 4 to ratify an agreement between the union and the Coachella-Imperial distributors. When the election was conducted on June 23, the union lost 152 to 46. However the election was voided when both growers

²²Ibid.

²³"Eight More Growers Sign Contracts with Farm Workers," NC News Service, June 30, 1970. Fresno, Calif.

and the union agreed there had been irregularities. Both sides also said opponents of the agreement had falsely stated that signing with the union would mean a loss of jobs on other farms. The new election was supervised by Monsignor Roger Mahoney and the Rev. Lloyd Saatjin, pastor of the United Methodist Church of Palm Springs.²⁴

By the ratification of the agreement between these thirty three growers and the union, most of the Coachella Valley growers were now under union contract. Only four growers out of a total of 52, in this valley, were now unsigned by the union. About a tenth of California's table grapes are grown in the Coachella area. The rest are produced in the San Joaquin Valley. The outcome of the grape dispute was now almost inevitable, as a very successful grape boycott began to dry up the market for non-union grapes. Brokers hesitated or refused to handle grapes without the union label. The boycott machinery pushed the sale of union grapes and these began to command premium prices. Many growers in Delano, which was close to its July harvest period, did not know where they were going to be able to sell their grapes.²⁵

²⁴Ibid.

²⁵From Bishops' Ad Hoc Committee on Farm Labor Dispute Report at the National Conference of Catholic Bishops, November 16, 1970.

At this particular stage of the five-year-old grape strike the Governor of California, Ronald Reagan, offered a number of proposals to help solve the dispute. Governor Reagan proposed that the California State Conciliation Service supervise secret-ballot union representation elections among farm workers, on a farm by farm basis. Reagan's proposal required that the union would call off the strike or boycott during the time that discussions were being held on the ground rules for conducting elections. Reagan's offer was immediately accepted by the South Central Farmers Committee, a group of Delano growers who until that time had refused to hold elections or negotiations with UFWOC. The union, however, turned down the governor's proposal, saying that the time for elections had passed. Larry Itliong, UFWOC assistant director, countered that "this is not the time for calling off everything while elections are discussed." He said the "union stands ready to negotiate," but would continue its strike and boycott "against all growers who have not signed contracts."²⁶

Bishop Donnelly called the governor's proposals "wholly unrealistic." He said, "The boycott was the source of the union's strength and the union had asked for elections almost five years ago, and for all these years

²⁶Gerard E. Sherry, "New Element In Grape Strike Dispute," NC News Service, July 7, 1970. Fresno, Calif.

these growers would not consider the request." Bishop Donnelly was not surprised that the union rejected the Governor's proposals, and that the union would have no part of the State Mediation Service.²⁷

In Reagan's statement there was no mention made of the work of the Bishops' Committee in bringing growers and workers together in contract settlements. The only mention of the Church or clergy was in reference to his suggestion that they join with others in calling off the boycott while elections took place. In view of the continuing stalemate, Bishop Donnelly sent a telegram to the spokesman of the growers offering the services of the Bishops' Committee to bring the parties together. The spokesman replied that he would welcome the good offices of the Bishops' Committee.

Accordingly, in early July, the union met with representatives of 26 growers from the Delano area, under the auspices of the Bishops' Committee. Negotiations were extremely difficult. The union looked upon these 26 growers as the nub of all its difficulties and problems for almost five years. Union demands were more insistent than in other negotiations. However, many matters were discussed and some progress was made. But on July 11,

²⁷ From Bishops' Ad Hoc Committee on Farm Labor Dispute Report to the National Conference of Catholic Bishops, November 16, 1970.

negotiations broke down and both the union and the growers went home. The Bishops' Committee, seeing no prospect of immediate resumption of the negotiations, also left on July 21.²⁸

The Bishops' Committee had to contend with another problem in the person of Father Daniel Lyons, editor of Twin Circle. Lyons had continued to write editorials that were critical of Chavez and the United Farm Workers Organizing Committee. At this time he also became extremely critical of the role of the Bishops' Committee in the whole dispute. The July 12th issue of the Twin Circle carried an editorial, written by Lyons, which was a particularly vitriolic attack on the Bishops' Ad Hoc Committee. In it Lyons declared that "Chavez had managed to get all the Catholic Bishops behind him officially." But Lyons added, "only a few Catholic Bishops are actively behind him, but the good name of them all is being used because a Bishops' committee was set up and is acting in their name." He added that "the committee intends to dedicate its efforts to organizing all the farm workers in America. There is no indication the rest of the bishops had this in mind when they supported the committee on table grapes. As far as

²⁸ Ibid.

we can determine, it is a power the committee usurped."²⁹

Lyons reserved his bitterest attack for Monsignor Higgins, who he said was in favor of compulsory unionism. Lyons said that he (Higgins) and "one or two active bishops" have determined that "compulsory unionism should be imposed on the workers." The editorial concluded by saying, "We cannot believe that most of America's bishops would approve of what is being done in their name if they were fully aware of the facts. Coercion of both workers and employers ill becomes the Church Christ founded."³⁰

The Ad Hoc Committee's attention was drawn to the editorial and elicited from the Bishops one of the sharpest criticisms ever directed against a national Catholic newspaper. In a 560 word statement issued on July 15, the five Bishops of the Ad Hoc Committee declared, "It is incredible that a publication calling itself 'Catholic' should publish such a collection of untruths, innuendos, distortions and plain inaccuracies in interpreting the views and motives of Ad Hoc Committee members, all of whom are Bishops, speaking for and acting in the name of the entire American hier-

²⁹ Father Daniel Lyons, S.J., "Chavez Reaps Bitter Harvest," Twin Circle, July 12, 1970. pp. 4,5. See Appendix 1.

³⁰ Ibid.

archy."³¹

The statement also noted that this editorial was just one in a series which had "consistently impeded the peaceful resolution of the farm labor dispute." But the Bishops found that the July 12th editorial was particularly deplorable because it came at a time when "it could do irreparable harm to both the growers and the union who have so long agonized with this unfortunate dispute." The statement concluded, "We deplore the fact that Twin Circle has seemingly taken upon itself the task of undermining the confidence of the public in this Ad Hoc Committee of Bishops. Its crude attempts to pit priest against priest, and bishop against bishop are unbecoming of a Catholic publication. Unfortunately Father Lyons has only further fanned the flames of prejudice and mistrust and has done a grave disservice to the cause of truth and justice. We hope that he and his associates at Twin Circle will reconsider the shallow and negative policies they are pursuing in relation to this dispute and that they will return to the path of charity and brotherly love."³²

Father Lyons continued to speak out on the farm labor

³¹Press Release of U. S. Catholic Conference, July 15, 1970., "Bishops' Committee Statement on Grape Worker Editorial," Washington, D. C. See Appendix V

³²Ibid.

problem and finally in August, Archbishop Robert J. Dwyer of Portland, Oregon, the board chairman of the Twin Circle, accepted his resignation as editor. Explaining the resignation, Archbishop Dwyer declared that he and Patrick Frawley, owner of the paper, were "deeply disturbed over Father Lyons' unfair criticism of Los Angeles Archbishop Timothy Manning and the other members of the Ad Hoc Committee." Dwyer emphasized that Father Lyons would remain in good standing with Twin Circle and would continue to write a weekly column for the newspaper.³³

The whole controversy did not affect the outcome of the grape dispute. On July 19, the United Farm Workers' Organizing Committee announced that the union had signed contracts with nine more table grape growers from the Porterville area of the San Joaquin Valley. The new contracts brought to 35 per cent the total contract settlements won by UFWOC in negotiations with California growers. On July 23rd, two of the largest growers in the Delano area contacted the union, and two days later an agreement was reached between the union and another 26 growers. The growers in question represented 50% of the table grape in-

³³Gerard E. Sherry, "Twin Circle Editor Resigns," NC News Service, August 21, 1970. Culver City, Calif.

dustry and the contracts covered more than 6,000 pickers.³⁴

It was, of course, the biggest and most important agreement reached during the long grape strike. Eighty-five per cent of the table grape industry was now under contract. The only ones holding out were the grape growers in Fresno and Tulare Counties. These were expected to sign within the week. So the agreement signalled the end of the grape boycott. The event was of supreme importance to the union. Their victory was made sweeter by the fact that the 26 growers went for the July 29 signing to union headquarters in rural Delano, the little town where the original strike began in 1965.

At the request of Cesar Chavez, Bishop Donnelly presided at the signing. Congratulating both sides over the settlement, Bishop Donnelly said it "brings to happy conclusion five years of strife and turmoil in the fields of this rich and verdant valley of abundance." John Giumarra, Jr., spokesman for the growers, said that the signing "brings a new era to agriculture." He pledged that his group would do everything possible to make the agreement work. And he added, "The eyes of America are on Delano. If unionization works here, it can work elsewhere. That is the fantastic

³⁴From Bishops' Ad Hoc Committee on Farm Labor Dispute Report to the National Conference of Catholic Bishops, November 16, 1970.

sense of responsibility on both sides."³⁵

Cesar Chavez said the settlement was proof that "social justice could be got through non-violent means." He said that the union entered the negotiations with a certain amount of apprehension. But he said the negotiators got on very well and the growers gave genuine expressions of good will. "We discovered that the growers did not have horns, and they discovered that we did not have tails."³⁶

The contracts signed were similar to previous settlements, with the exception that the hourly wage was \$1.80 per hour, with an increase of 25 cents over a three year period. Most of the previous contracts were for \$1.75 per hour, with similar increase and fringe benefits. By early September the rest of the table grape growers signed contracts and Chavez called off the grape boycott. And so the great grape boycott came to an end.³⁷

Bishop Donnelly cautioned that the settlements were only a beginning. "What is needed now," the Bishop said, "is a thorough evaluation of the whole process of farm-

³⁵ Gerard E. Sherry, "Five-Year Grape Impasse Fades With Major Worker-Grower Accord," NC News Service, July 30, 1970. Delano, California.

³⁶ Ibid.

³⁷ Interview with Monsignor George Higgins, Jan. 29, 1971.

management relations, spelling out the rights and duties of both sides. We need federal legislation offering protection for both sides--but especially the farm worker, who has little or no protection as of now."³⁸

The Bishops' Committee received much acclaim for their role in bringing the dispute to an end. Bishop Joseph L. Bernardin, general secretary of the National Conference of Catholic Bishops, hailed the role that the Committee had played in the negotiations. In a telegram to the Committee, Bishop Bernardin said the Bishops' group had fulfilled its mandate established the previous April when the NCCB endorsed the Committee's work and backed it "in its appeal to the growers and the workers to speedily resolve this dispute through collective bargaining." Bishop Bernardin said the Committee's mediation efforts, carried on in the name of the conference, "are a visible sign of the concern of the Church for the establishment of true social justice for growers and farm workers alike."³⁹

When Bishop Donnelly submitted his report to the body of Bishops at Washington on November 17th, it was enthusiastically received. The Bishops voted to continue the

³⁸ Bill Boyarsky, "Handshakes Seal Pact Ending Grape Boycott," Los Angeles Times, July 30, 1970, Sec. 1 p. 28

³⁹ "NCCB Executive Hails Grape Accord, Bishops' Involvement," NC News Service, July 30, 1970. See Appendix III

Ad Hoc Committee for one year and accepted Bishop Donnelly's recommendation that the committee be henceforth known as "The Bishops' Ad Hoc Committee on Farm Labor."⁴⁰

Undoubtedly the Bishops' Committee made a very significant contribution to the settlement of the Farm Labor Dispute. Perhaps they should have got involved sooner, but certainly they did get in at a crucial time when the situation was right for action. The Committee carried with it a great deal of prestige and consequently was able to bring the parties together in a way that no other group could have done at that time. Its Success, no doubt, will encourage the Church to address itself to similar problems and experiment with similar committees. And so the Church's intervention in the Farm Labor Dispute not only proved successful, but was an indication of the Church's concern that social justice be established for all.

⁴⁰Interview with Archbishop Manning, April 1, 1971.

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FATHER LYONS

Views the News

Chavez reaps bitter harvest

I WENT TO THE Coachella Valley with Father Cletus Healy late in June to find out the latest developments regarding the table-grape situation. The Valley is in the vicinity of Palm Springs, 100 miles east of Los Angeles. We also went to the Bakersfield and Delano area to talk with workers, growers, pastors and other knowledgeable persons to find out all we could. Father Healy will be writing a more detailed account of our latest investigations for our readers, but I am anxious to tell you my conclusions.

First of all, do not think of grape-pickers as an oppressed people. They are the highest paid agricultural workers in the nation. A long-time pastor in Delano told us he had often said to concerned outsiders: "Go out and find a family that is underfed and come back and tell me, so I can feed them." They have apparently never found any. Secondly, do not think the workers are clamoring to join the union. As a union organizer, Cesar Chavez has failed miserably to get workers behind him. Thirdly, do not labor under the illusion there has been a workers' strike against the growers.

Chavez called for a strike against the growers, but he could never get more than a handful of workers to go out on strike. So he hired pickets who were non-workers, and induced hippies, members of the SDS and other characters from the Berkeley campus and elsewhere to picket various ranches. Newspapers and TV crews then interviewed the picket as though they were workers out on strike.

"Poisoned" Grapes

Since a strike is supposed to be a withholding of labor by workers on the job, the effort failed miserably. Chavez then launched a nationwide boycott, but this too failed until recently. Having failed to get the workers behind him, having failed with his strike tactics, having failed with his boycott, he launched a fourth weapon: pesticides. He claimed the growers were using poisonous pesticides, so no one should eat grapes. Then he cynically agreed to waive the poison issue if the majority of growers would sign contracts with him. But was beaten on the pesticide issue when the State of California Department of Agriculture proved that his charges were untrue.

But Chavez is not a failure. He has succeeded in getting hundreds of thousands of dollars from the AFL-CIO. He has gotten millions of dollars worth of publicity. He has successfully formed committees in nearly 100 cities to pressure the chain stores into boycotting table grapes. In Chi-

cago alone he has 40 full-time representatives working on the boycott. He has gotten mayors in such big cities as New York, Boston and Detroit to support his boycott. He has organized pickets all over the country to man the entrances to chain stores with their placards.

Whether Chavez is behind it or not, he has also profited from fires that have been set in score of sheds, owned by growers in strategic areas, and from hundreds of tires that have been slashed on the cars of grape pickers who have not succumbed to his tactics. He has gotten hundreds of clergymen, and particularly priests, to picket stores and call on store managers to persuade them to boycott grapes. He has also managed to get all the Catholic bishops in the United States behind him officially. Only a few Catholic bishops are actively behind him, but the good name of them all is being used because a bishops' committee was set up and is acting in their name.

Committee Usurped Power

As the spokesmen for the bishops' committee, Auxiliary Bishop Joseph Donnelly of Hartford and Monsignor George Higgins of Washington, D.C., said they would do everything they could to organize the table-grape industry. And that is only the beginning, they pointed out. The committee intends to dedicate its efforts to organizing all of the farm workers in America. There is no indication the rest of the bishops had this in mind when they supported the committee on table grapes. As far as we can determine, it is a power committee simply usurped.

That the name of the U.S. bishops is being used in the campaign to organize the table-grape industry is unprecedented. We have also found it bitterly resented. In the Coachella Valley, for example, 70 percent of the growers are not Catholic. Among them is the head of their association, who is facing bankruptcy because he will not force his workers to join Chavez's union. He met twice with the bishops' committee, but said it refuses to meet with him any further because a bishop on the panel thought he had not been sufficiently respectful. Of course, in the eyes of the grower the bishop was just another pleader for Chavez.

Shortly before he died in Illinois this past May, Father John Coogan, S.J., wrote to Twin Circle that Monsignor George Higgins, who is the dynamo behind the bishops' committee, has spent his life crusading for compulsory unionism. "As far as grapes are concerned, Higgins can take them or leave them," he said. Father Coogan, who taught social science at the University of Detroit for many years, and who preceded this writer as current affairs columnist for Our Sunday Visitor, knew whereof he spoke.

By right, Cesar Chavez should have had to convince the workers they should join his union. He never did. He is about as popular with most of the workers as the seven-day itch. If they oppose his union he sometimes threatens to have the Internal Revenue Service harass them. The union contracts he has signed have forced the workers to pay so many fees, dues and assessments they are all receiving less take-home pay than they were before. And they are forced to pay these sums by having the money taken out of their checks by the employer, under pressure from the union. Furthermore, Chavez is bringing in thousands of workers from Mexico to take the jobs of residents, since so many refuse to join his union even under pain of losing their job. He is constantly advertising for workers on the radio in Mexico, and the workers in California know it. Only ten percent of grape pickers were migrant workers before Chavez came in, and the condemned the importation of workers from Mexico in the past.

Many Workers Fired

Just as Chavez has never succeeded in getting the worker behind him, so he never succeeded in getting enough people to stop buying grapes. Where he did succeed is in getting so much pressure on chain store managers that they were afraid to handle his grapes. He succeeded so well with this that he has finally forced many employers to sign a union contract with him. In doing this he never consults with the workers. He merely forces the employer to discharge all those who will not sign up with his union.

From all we could find out by talking with workers and employers, the so-called union elections are a farce. Employers who have signed a union contract have usually done so because the boycott has made it impossible for them to sell their product, so they face financial ruin. The union promises to sell their grapes for them, and it does so by forcing stores to buy grapes with the union label on the box. It then acts as the broker.

The union makes no attempt to contact the workers before it forces an employer to sign a contract. Numerous employers quote Monsignor Higgins as saying: "Either you sign a union contract or we have no recourse but to have the bishops across the country enforce the boycott and make you sign." When employers ask him why the workers are not consulted by the union, the Monsignor declares: "That is not necessary. They can ratify the contract later."

What is so shocking is to have the workers and employers tell you what "ratification" means. It means telling the workers they will be fired that day, or at least within three days, if they do not sign a union card. Those workers unwilling to join the union then leave. That is why you hear that "the workers voted to join the union 70-0." Sometimes the figure is given as "70 to 2," as in a Russian election.

As Father Coogan pointed out, compulsory unionism is what Monsignor Higgins is totally committed to pushing. That is why he and his committee of one or two active bishops talk with the union as though it represents the workers, instead of trying to understand the thinking of the workers themselves. They have determined that compulsory unionism is what should be imposed on the workers, whether the workers like it or not, and whether the workers want this particular union or not. When the bishops' committee talks about "negotiations" they mean compulsory unionism and nothing else.

Working Conditions Unchanged

No working conditions are changed by the union contract. All they get is \$1.75 per hour, plus commission, instead of \$1.65 per hour, plus the same commission. If the workers were being underpaid, how has the union helped them? They are getting considerably less money now, after they pay their initiation fees, union dues and assessments. And what is the justice of forcing workers to join a union unless they want it?

The bishops' committee is not listening to the pastors involved or to their parishioners. Large numbers of Catholics have already been alienated from the Church, and thousands of non-Catholics have been embittered by the arbitrary, high-handed action of the bishops' committee.

A "Fight to the Death"

Chavez describes his movement as a "fight to the death. They destroy our union or we conquer them." He is now moving his hired pickets against the \$11 million melon crop in the Imperial Valley. Melons are vulnerable because they begin rotting within three days after ripening. A spokesman for the union said pickets will move from field to field, picketing crops as they ripen. Reports the Los Angeles Herald-Examiner: "Chavez' tactics of intimidation and threats have closed three fields comprising 300 acres of one grower's total of 1,200. The cost to the grower is estimated at \$30,000 a day." As usual, none of the workers belong to his union, but he hopes to force the employer to compel them to join.

We expect that of Chavez, but we cannot believe that most of America's bishops would approve of what is being done in their name if they were fully aware of the facts. Coercion of both the workers and employers ill becomes the Church Christ founded.

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BISHOPS' COMMITTEE STATEMENT ON GRAPE WORKER EDITORIAL

July 15, 1970

The following statement was issued (July 15) by the U.S. Bishops' Ad Hoc Committee on the Farm Labor Dispute, in response to an editorial written by Jesuit Father Daniel Lyons and published in Twin Circle dated July 12:

The ad hoc committee's attention has been drawn to an editorial in the July 12 issue of Twin Circle authored by Jesuit Father Daniel Lyons. The editorial purports to review the five-year-old California grape strike dispute and this ad hoc committee's role in it.

It is incredible that a publication calling itself "Catholic" should publish such a collection of untruths, innuendos, distortions and plain inaccuracies in interpreting the views and motives of ad hoc committee members, all of whom are bishops, speaking for and acting in the name of the entire American hierarchy.

It is not possible here to cite all the errors and distortions contained in Father Lyons' editorial. Suffice to say, we believe it to be a gross fraud on the Catholic community. It is also divisive for it attempts to isolate ad hoc committee members from their brother bishops with the insulting accusation that the ad hoc committee has allegedly 'usurped' power not given it by the National Conference of Catholic Bishops (NCCB).

Our experience with growers and workers, in our frequent trips to the San Joaquin and Coachella valleys, is totally at variance with the opinions of Father Lyons and the newspaper which he edits. Furthermore, never has he given the ad hoc committee the courtesy of seeking its views or studying its findings. He has consistently used limited sources of information which are hostile to this ad hoc committee and which are totally misinformed about its role of mediation and conciliation.

Furthermore this latest editorial intervention by Father Lyons is but one of a series of editorials and articles in Twin Circle which have consistently impeded the peaceful resolution of the farm labor dispute. This most recent editorial is particularly deplorable because it comes at a time when it could do irreparable harm to both the growers and the union who have so long agonized with this unfortunate dispute.

At this very moment the ad hoc committee is meeting in Fresno at the written invitation of the Western Employers Council which speaks for growers with more than 50% of the table grape acreage in California. We have been asked by these growers to try to get negotiations started in this major segment of the table grape industry. This bungling interference of Twin Circle has injected an added and unnecessary note of bitterness to the dispute.

In April of this year at the semi-annual meeting of the NCCB in San Francisco, the U.S. bishops unanimously endorsed the work of this ad hoc committee and voted to continue to support its ministry of service to growers and workers, and its attempts to resolve the dispute through the process of collective bargaining.

We deplore the fact that Twin Circle has seemingly taken upon itself the task of undermining the confidence of the public in this ad hoc committee of bishops. Its crude attempts to pit priest against priest and bishop against bishop are unbecoming of a Catholic publication. Unfortunately Father Lyons has only further fanned the flames of prejudice and mistrust and has done a grave disservice to the cause of truth and justice. We hope that he and his associates at Twin Circle will reconsider the shallow and negative policies they are pursuing in relation to this dispute and that they will return to the path of charity and brotherly love.

In conclusion we express the hope that the readers of Twin Circle will reject Father Lyons' negative tone in relation to this matter and that they will urge upon him and his associates a more objective policy in covering the social justice issues at stake.

Archbishop Timothy Manning
of Los Angeles

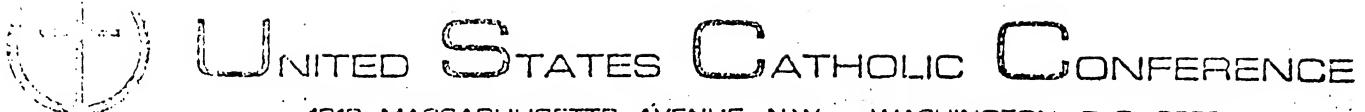
Bishop Hugh A. Donohue
of Fresno, Calif.

Bishop Walter W. Curtis
of Bridgeport, Conn.

Bishop Humberto S. Medeiros
of Brownsville, Texas

Auxiliary Bishop Joseph F. Donnelly
of Hartford, Conn.
(committee chairman)

* * * *



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NEWS

NATIONAL CATHOLIC OFFICE FOR INFORMATION

Date: July 30, 1970

From: William Ryan

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

WASHINGTON--Bishop Joseph L. Bernardin, General Secretary of the National Conference of Catholic Bishops, has sent a telegram to the U.S. Bishops' Ad Hoc Committee on the Farm Labor Dispute. The Ad Hoc Committee helped to mediate the dispute between the United Farm Workers Organizing Committee and growers in Delano, California.

This is the text of Bishop Bernardin's telegram:

"Heartiest congratulations on the historic signing between the United Farm Workers Organizing Committee and 26 Delano growers representing 50% of the California table grape industry. The ad hoc Committee on the Farm Labor Dispute has fulfilled well the mandate given to it last April when the entire body of Bishops endorsed the work of the Committee and supported it 'in its appeal to the growers and the workers to speedily resolve this dispute through the process of collective bargaining.' Surely your mediatic efforts which have been carried on in the name of the Conference are a visible sign of the concern of the Church for the establishment of true social justice for growers and farm workers alike."

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